ACRYLIC PAINTING WITH PASSION

Explorations for Creating Art that Nourishes the Soul

TESIA BLACKBURN

Acrylic Painting with Passion

Explorations for Creating Art that Nourishes the Soul

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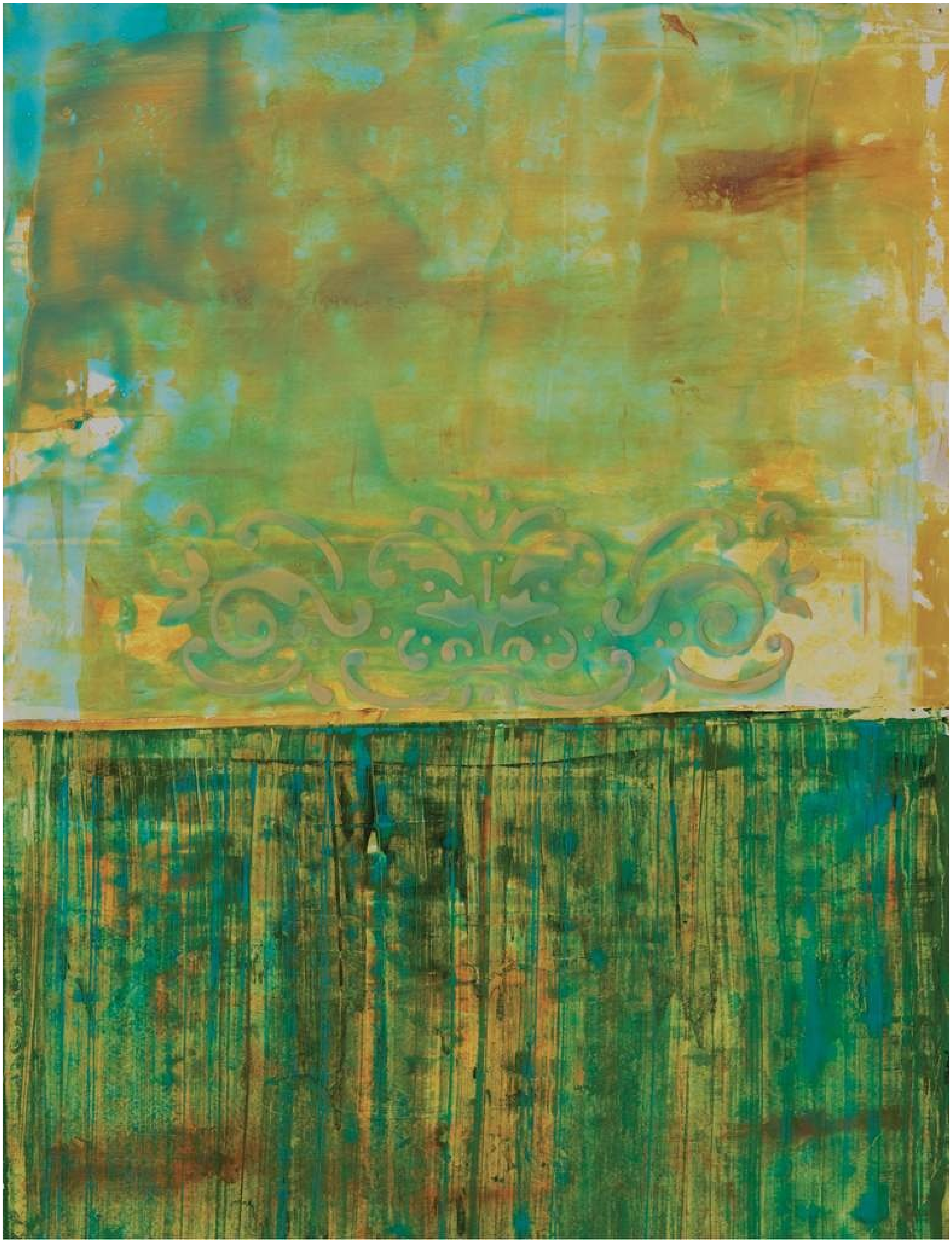


ITALIA XI

Tesia Blackburn
Acrylic on paper
15" × 20" (38cm × 51cm)

Introduction

Who is this book for? Everyone. If you are a beginning artist or a seasoned veteran, this book is for you. If you've ever stared at the blank page, canvas or wall and wondered, *What now?* This book is for you. If you have little time, no studio and little money, this book is for you. Maybe you're a full-time working artist who has hit a dry spell; this book is for you, too. This book is about how to get the creative spirit working—for the first time if you're a newbie or to jump-start it again if you are a longtime artist who needs a fresh perspective.

I've asked around and there seems to be a consensus: The hardest part about making art is getting started. Even professional artists get stuck at what I like to call the "procrastination station." You have the passion but all this other stuff gets in the way. First you have to find a space to work in, then you have to focus your attention and wait for divine inspiration … and maybe, just maybe, there's time to get something done before you have to make dinner, pick up the kids from soccer or balance your checkbook.

But what if it wasn't that hard? What if all you had to do was to tear up a brown bag and glue it onto a canvas? (We're going to do that here.) That will take about ten minutes. Just push the breakfast dishes aside and glue the bag down. Then come back later and work for ten minutes more. Do this three or four times and at the end of a week, you'll have a finished piece.

That is the premise of this book: taking your desire, your passion, to make art and using it in manageable chunks. Ten minutes here, twenty minutes there and pretty soon, you're making stuff. Put aside the idea that you are *making art* and just have fun.

I also want to encourage you to suspend your ideas of what makes art versus what is craft or hobby. You might think that ordinary stuff like paper towels or brown paper bags can't be used to make art. Too crafty for you? Consider that Robert Rauschenberg, the world-class American artist, used newspapers, old clothes and urban debris in his work. His pieces sell for millions. In his collages, Picasso used old theatre tickets, newspapers and oilcloth among other things. And everyone knows Picasso was an artist with a capital *A*!

You will also notice there isn't a lot of what I like to call "navel staring." That is to say, I'm not going to ask you to meditate or chant or stare at the sunset to become more creative. Just do the exercises and the creativity will take care of itself. I do believe in inspiration; don't get me wrong. I'm just more of the mind of the writer Somerset Maugham, who is said to have remarked, "I only work when inspiration strikes. Fortunately, it strikes every morning at nine o'clock sharp." In other words, just do it.

Sit back and enjoy this ride. There's no test at the end, no critique, no scorecard. Your only job is to play and have fun. I'll tell you a little secret: That's what professional working artists really do, play and have fun. I know this for a fact because that's what I do!

Some hints about how to use this book:

- Don't worry if you don't have exactly what's listed; use what you can find and afford.
- Don't obsess about making a perfect painting. Consider that the process of working is as valuable as the end result, the product.
- Take these ideas and expand on them, change them, reinvent them.
- Do lots of stuff. Whenever you find yourself with a spare twenty minutes, whip out a small painting or collage!
- Don't judge what you do. Just make stuff.

GETTING STARTED

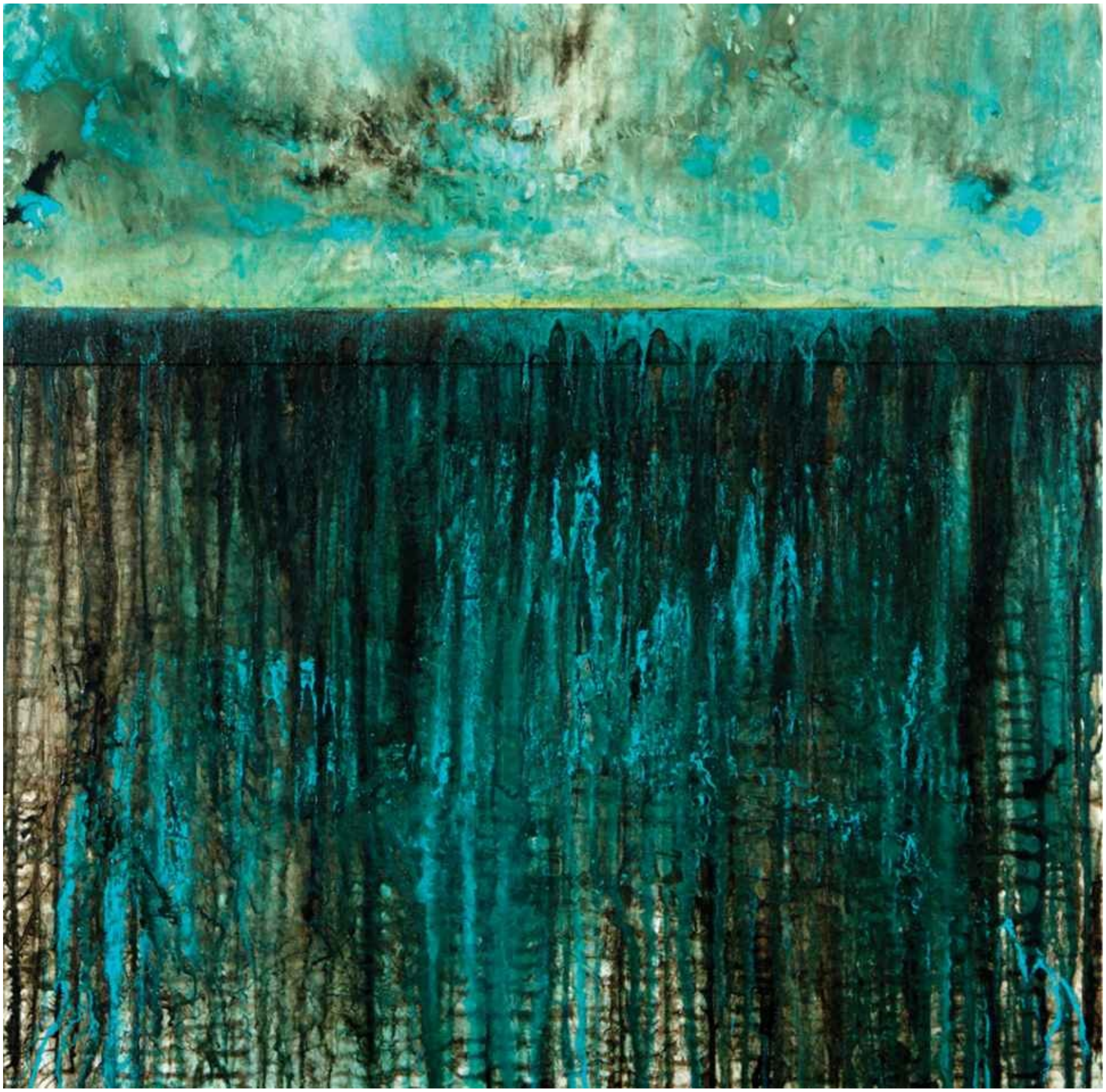
Rules & Tools (Design Principles & Elements)

Every endeavor has its own set of tools and rules and its own specific “gear.” If you are going to build a house, you need a hammer and nails. You also need a blueprint. Finally, you will need some lumber and maybe a window or two.

For artists, and in particular acrylic painters, we need tools like color, line, shape and so on. Our rules are based on balance, composition, emphasis and the like. Our gear is paint, canvas and brushes.

In this chapter I will boil these seemingly complex ideas down to a few nuggets. These will work to get you started if you’re a beginner or perhaps give you a new viewpoint if you’re a seasoned veteran. You can spend a lot of time and read a lot of books that will go into great detail on any one of these subjects. I’d like to suggest you get the gist of what you need here. And then? Trust your gut. When it’s all said and done, you really have to like what you’re doing, regardless of what the rules say.

“Color is just delicious, it is my world, it starts everything going. I spread it on my palette and I feel my creative juices flowing, it lights my life.” —Lynn Glenn



ITALIA XXV

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on Canvas 30" × 30" (76cm × 76cm)

Rules of the Road (Design Principles)

The six guiding principles of design:

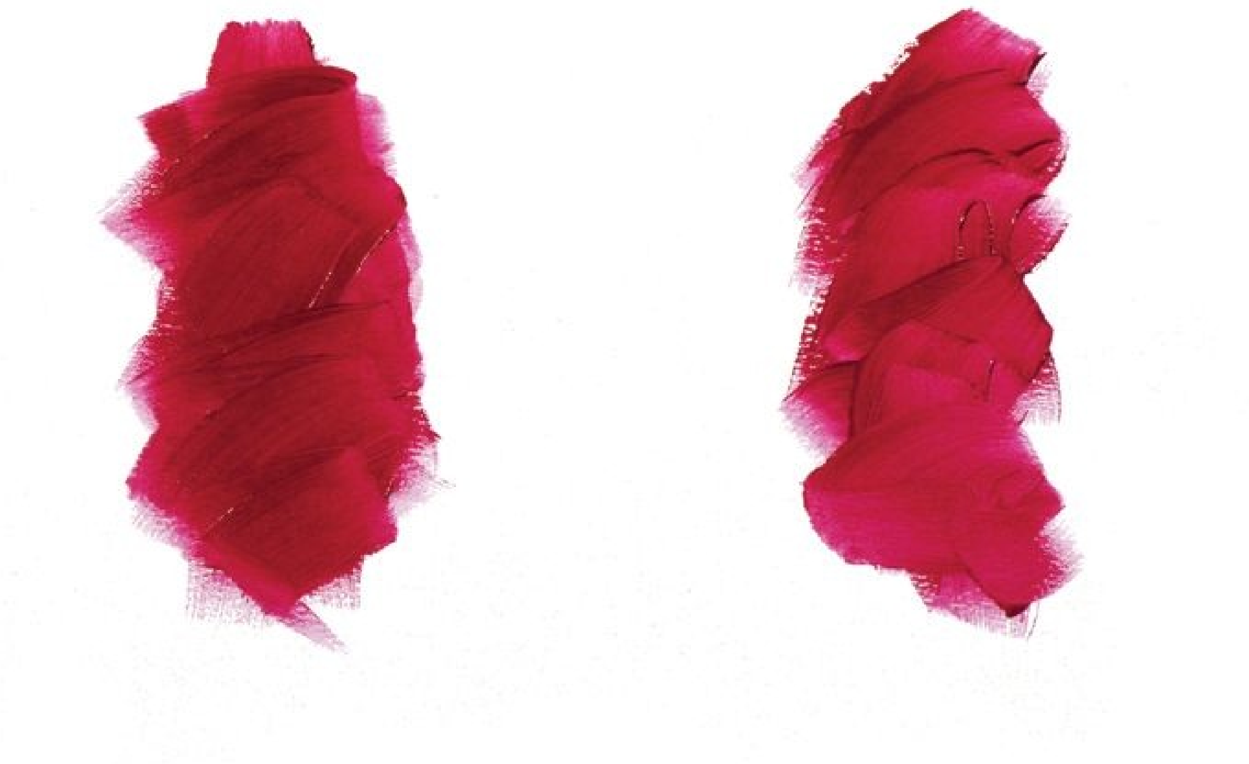
- Balance
- Rhythm/repetition
- Emphasis/focal point
- Proportion
- Unity/harmony
- Contrast

The design principles are your pals, your best buddies. Get to know them and they will serve you well. They're also great for troubleshooting. Can't figure out why that painting feels a tad off? Check the list of design principles and see where you've gone off track. Is the painting balanced? Too balanced? Does it have a good rhythm? Maybe it lacks unity or harmony.

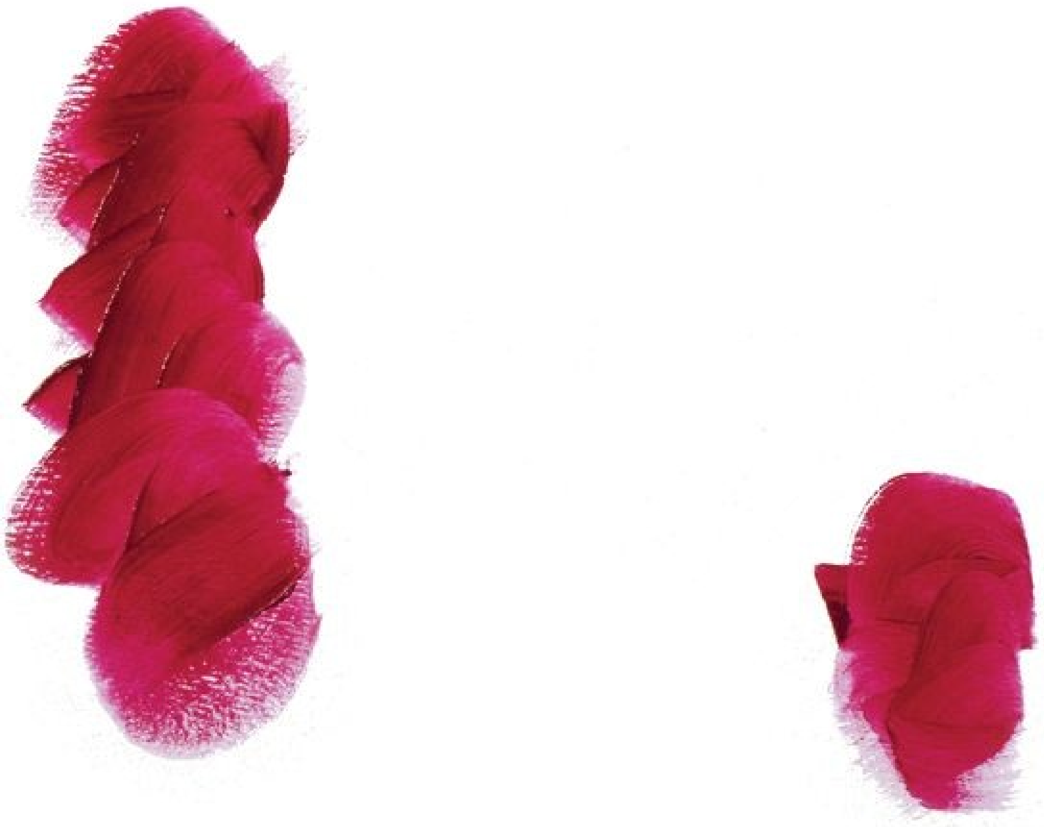
Again, you will know if you trust your gut. Humans are amazing. We can tell if something isn't quite right. Have you ever sat down in a booth in a restaurant and the table was too far away to eat comfortably? Or perhaps you were thinking about buying a chair, but once you sat in it, you found your feet didn't touch the ground. These things didn't feel quite right because of poor design. And you instinctively knew it. How? Because all good design is based on the best design of all—human beings.

BALANCE

Balance in a painting is the sense of visual equilibrium. This can be created in two ways: with symmetrical balance or asymmetrical balance. Think of two children on a seesaw. If they are the same exact weight, the seesaw would balance and not go up or down. Not much fun for the kids, kind of static. The same thing happens in a painting that has equal interest on both sides. Whether the interest is created with color or shape or whatever, the painting itself lacks movement; it’s static.



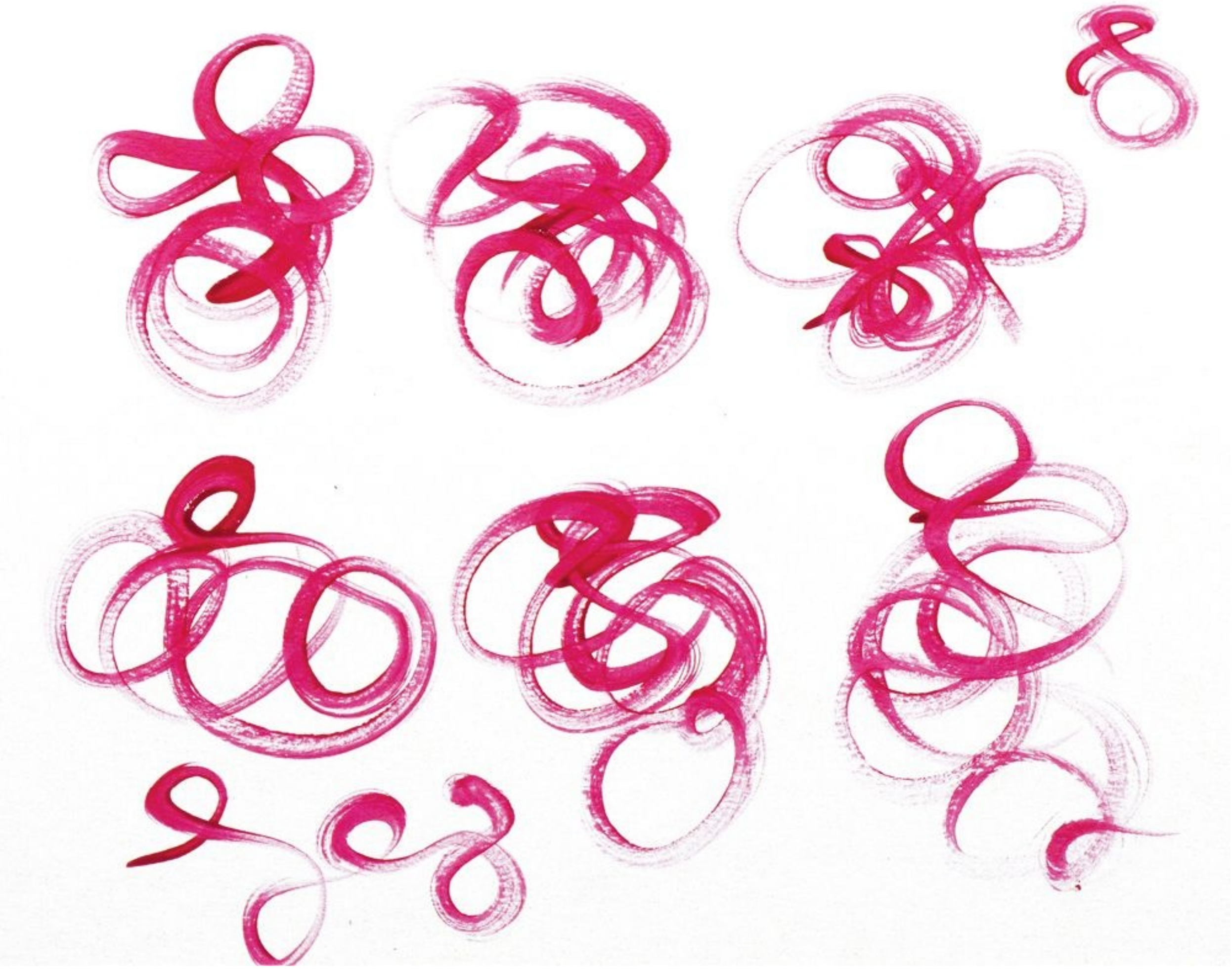
Symmetrical Balance



Asymmetrical Balance

RHYTHM AND REPETITION

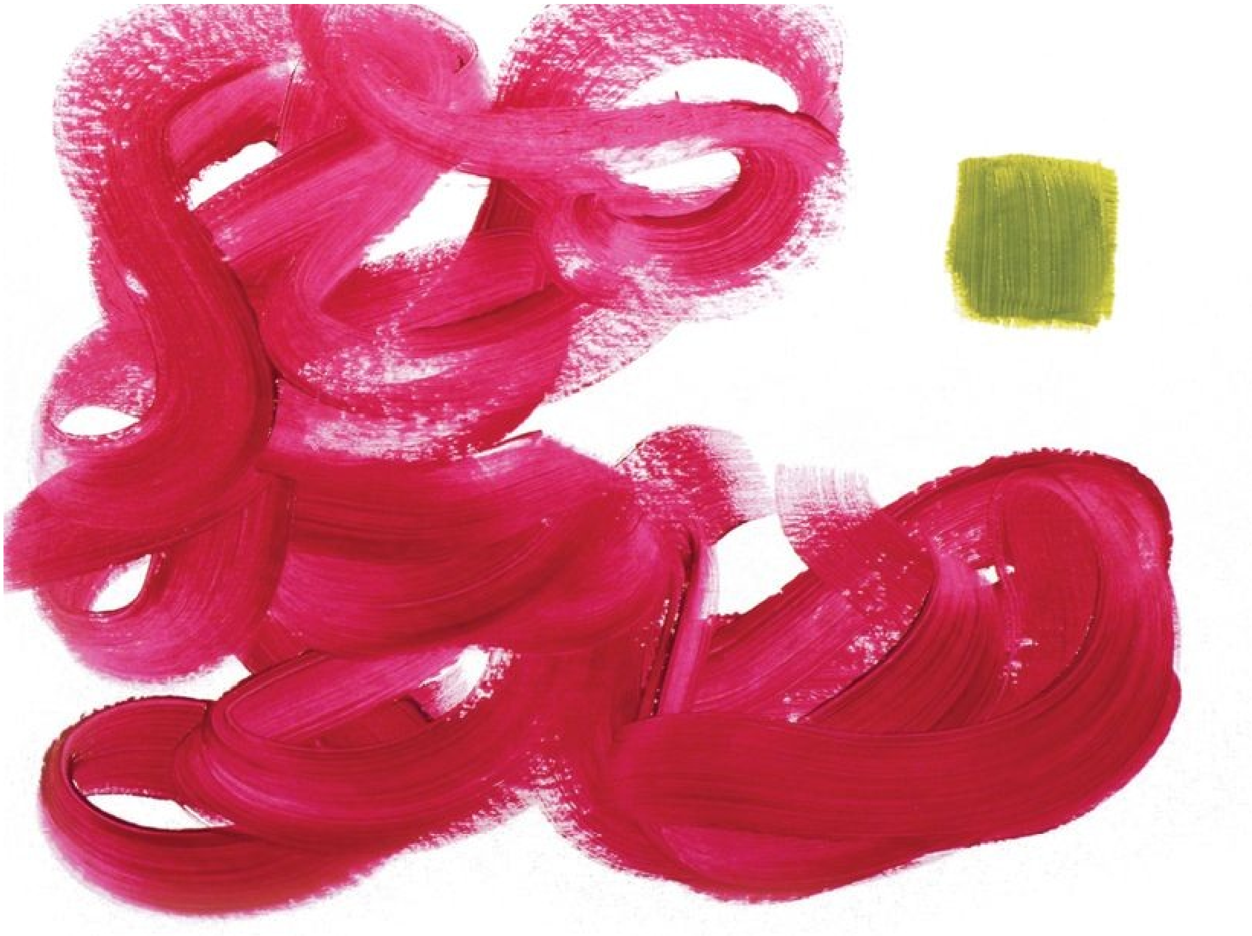
I love music. It is the film score in the movie of my life. I listen to all kinds of music when I’m painting: rock, classical, hip-hop, opera, country—you name it, it’s playing in my studio. I respond to the rhythm of music and in fact have created entire series of paintings based on a single song. Music and art are so closely related that we often use the same words to describe them. For instance, musicians play the “blues,” and rock and roll can be “hot” as can color. *Rhythm* is a word that music and visual art have in common. In painting, rhythm is created by repetition of some sort, just like notes are repeated in music to create rhythm. Repeated shapes, textures, colors or lines can create rhythm in the painting.



Rhythm and Repetition

EMPHASIS

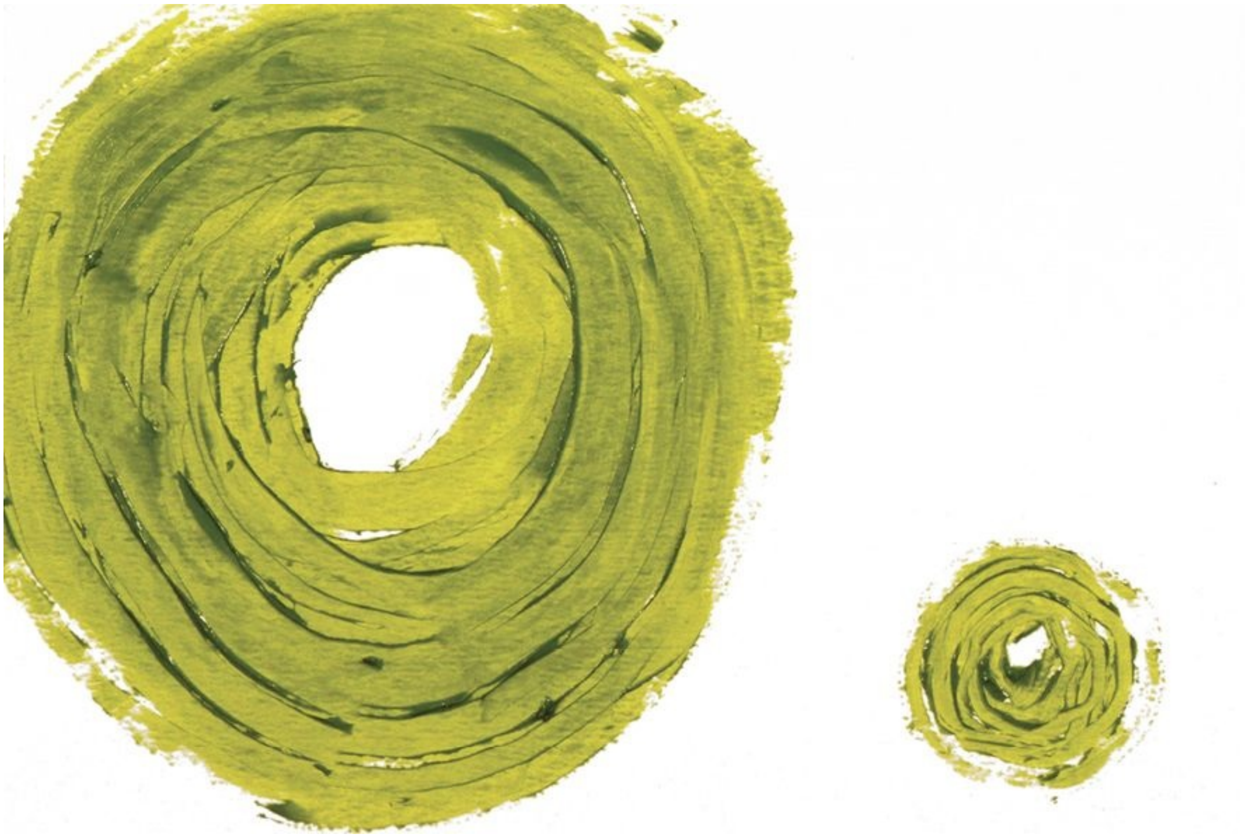
Emphasis is used to call attention to something. A small green square next to a large magenta shape is going to call attention to itself. Emphasis is also called “focal point.” It is usually the place that most strongly draws the viewer’s attention.



Emphasis

PROPORTION

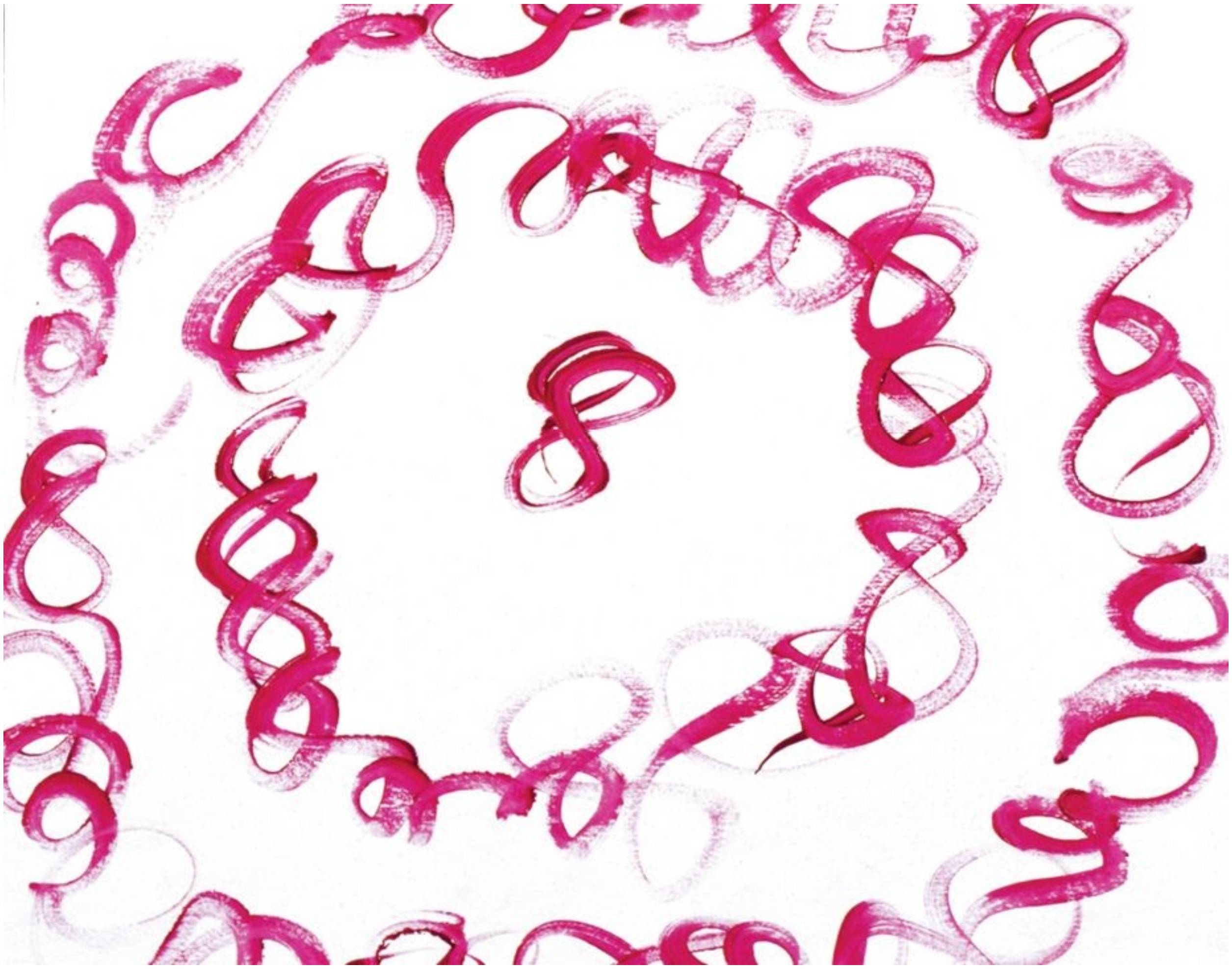
Proportion, sometimes referred to as scale, refers to the relative size and scale of the elements in the artwork. It is also based on their relationship to one another.



Proportion

HARMONY

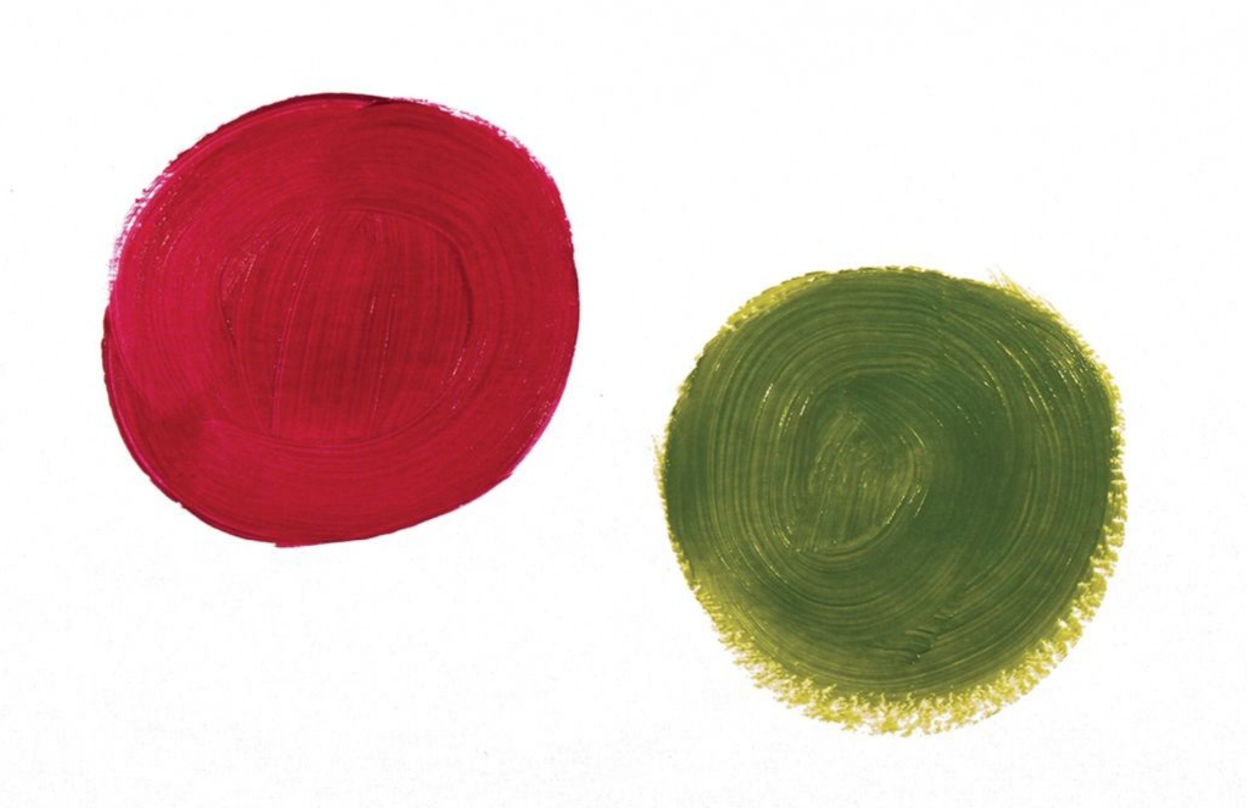
Unity and harmony refer to the idea that all of the parts of the artwork are working together to create a cohesive whole. It may be a unity of color, texture or a particular shape that creates a sense of harmony.



Harmony

CONTRAST

Simply stated, contrast is the arrangement of opposites. Red versus green, texture versus nontexture, round versus square and so on. All things being equal, the highest point of contrast will usually be the focal point or emphasis of the painting.



Contrast

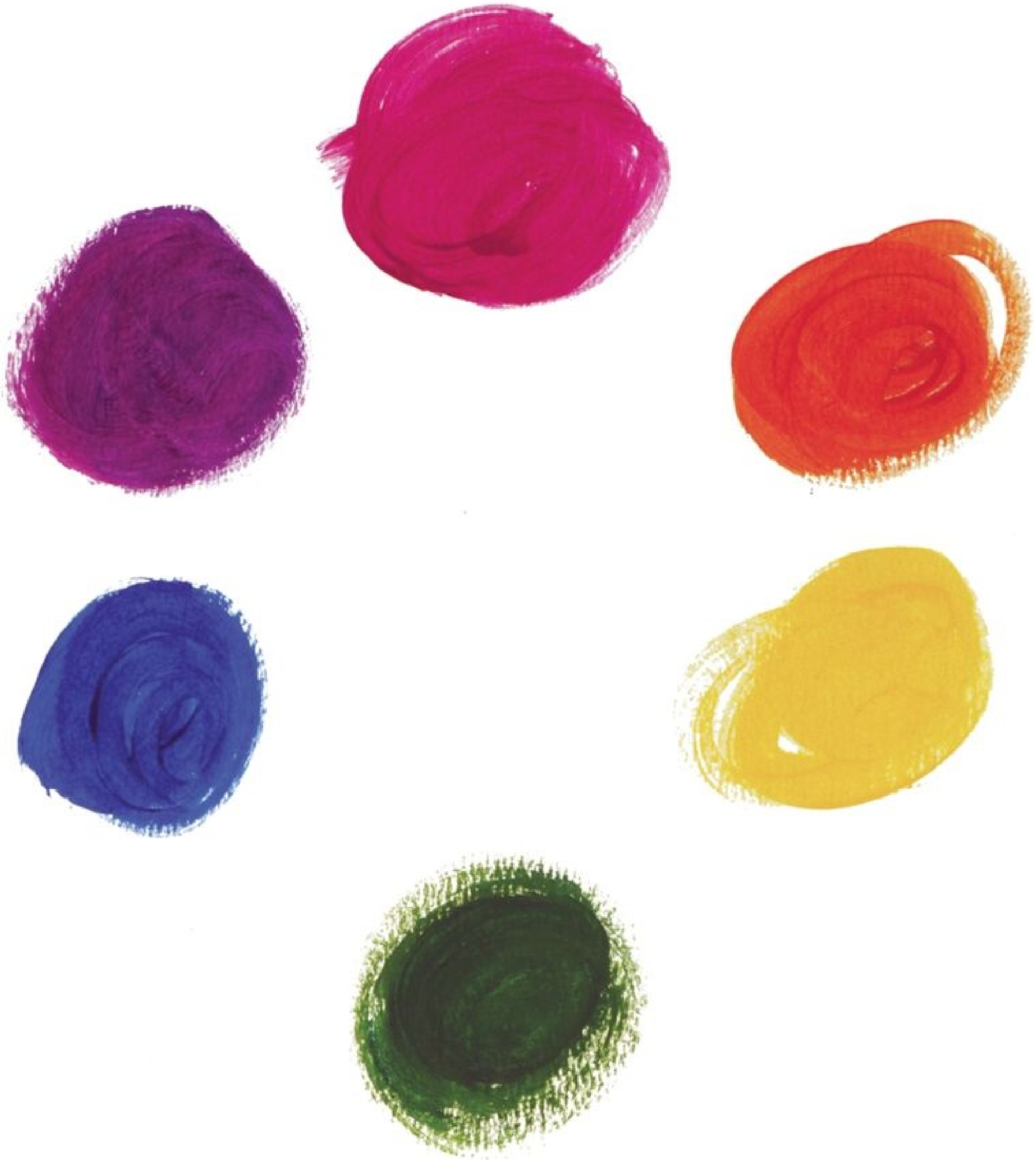
Tools of the Trade (Design Elements)

I’d like to introduce you to the five elements of design:

- Color
- Texture
- Shape
- Line
- Mark

COLOR

Thousands of pages have been written on this topic, and I’m not going to add to that except to say keep it simple. If you think you need four colors, use three. If you think you need five colors, use four. Learn to use the full range of a color instead of another color. For instance, use black and white with a single color and mix a broad range of tints, mutes and shades. See Exploration Six for an explanation of color terms.



Six Colors

The three primary colors are red, blue and yellow. The secondary colors are purple, green and orange. I prefer to use the pigment name rather than the color name because it is more precise.

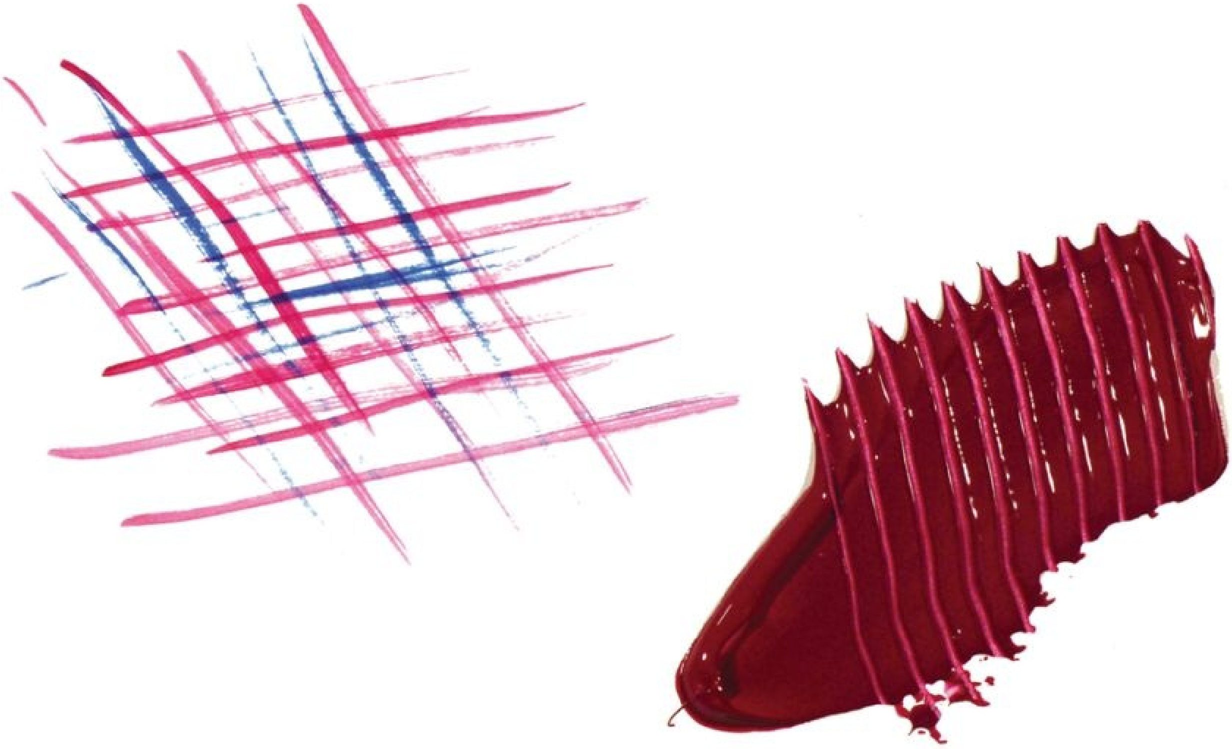
GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Phthalo Blue (Green Shade)
GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Quinacridone Magenta
GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Hansa Yellow Medium

Three Primaries

My three primaries are Quinacridone Magenta, Hansa Yellow Medium and Phthalo Blue (Green Shade). From these I can make just about anything I can see.

TEXTURE

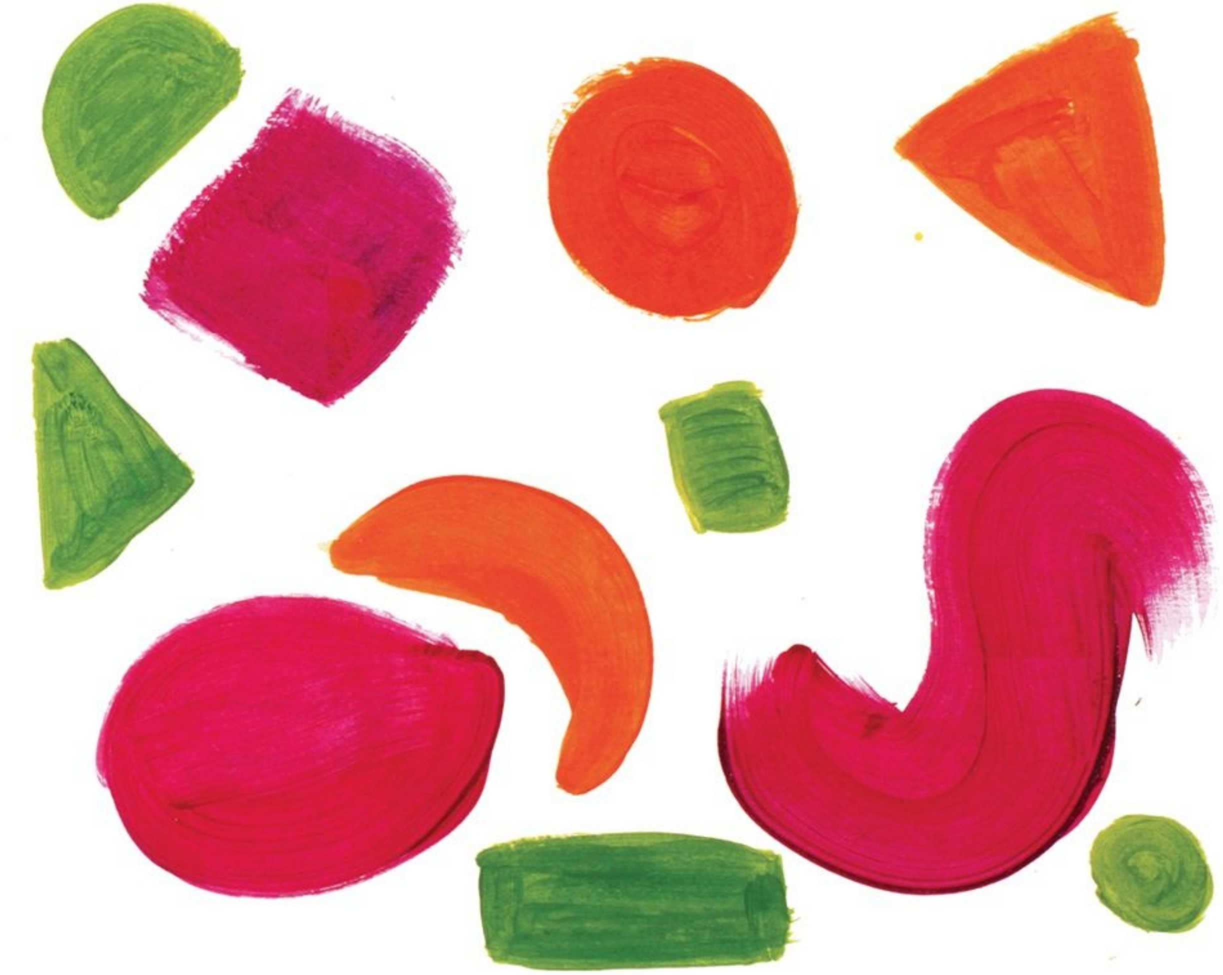
Texture can be real or imaginary (implied). Real texture in acrylic paintings can be created with the use of heavily applied paint, gels, collaged elements and so on. Imaginary texture is usually implied by the use of crosshatching or layering of lines in the painting.



Texture

SHAPE

The three basic shapes are a square, a triangle and a circle. All other shapes are derived from these. Organic shapes for the most part are circular in nature. An oak leaf, for example, is just a circle that’s been pinched and pulled in different directions. Geometric shapes are usually based on the square and triangle. So a man-made building will be mostly squarish, unless it’s designed by Frank Gehry! My advice here is the same as for color: Keep it simple. I’ve been working with circles for a long time, trying to figure them out. Maybe you’re inspired by ovals or wonky squared-off shapes. Whatever the case, use the shape over and over again, in different derivations using contrast, until you really understand it. For more on working in a series, see Using a Repeated Motif to Create a Series.

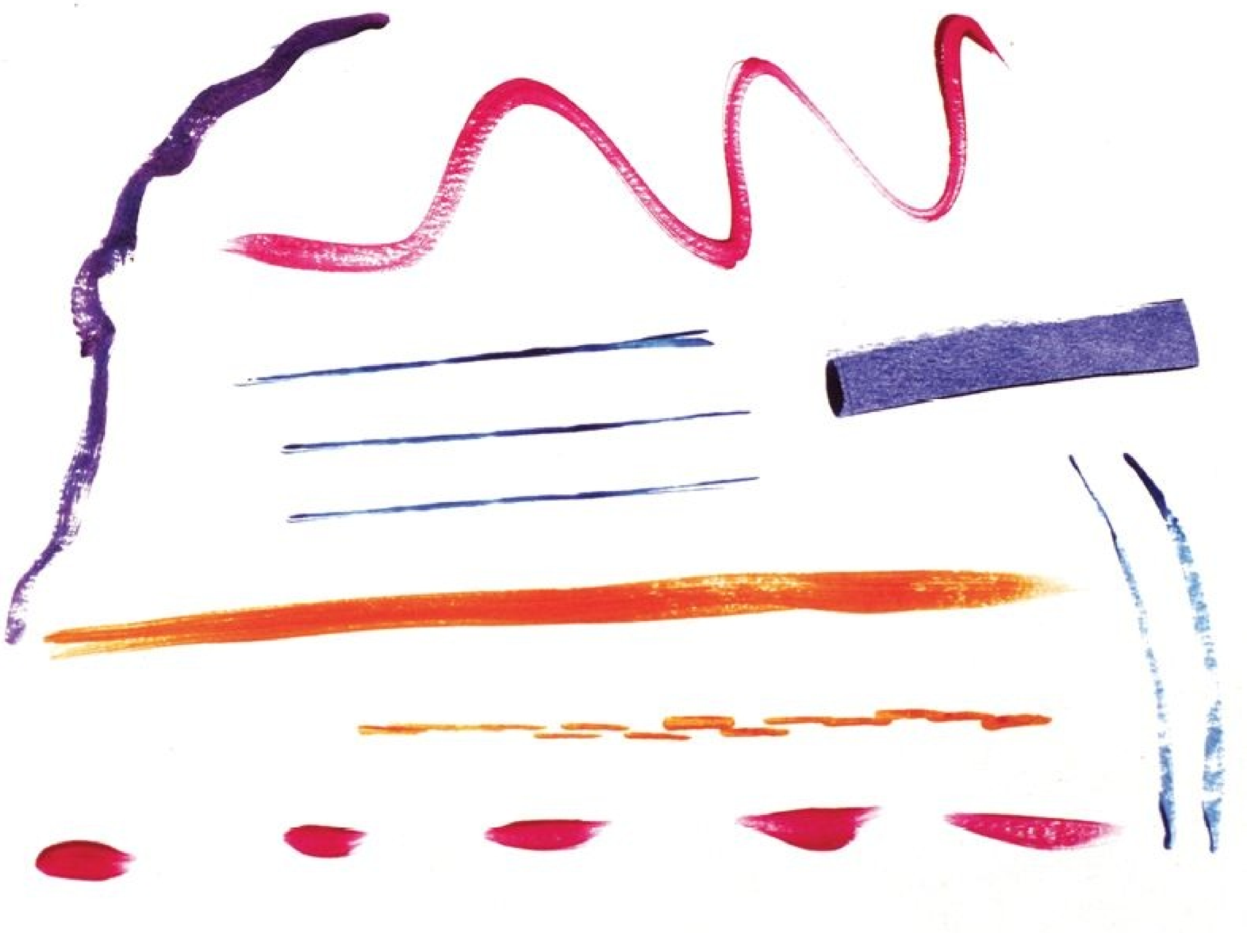


Shape

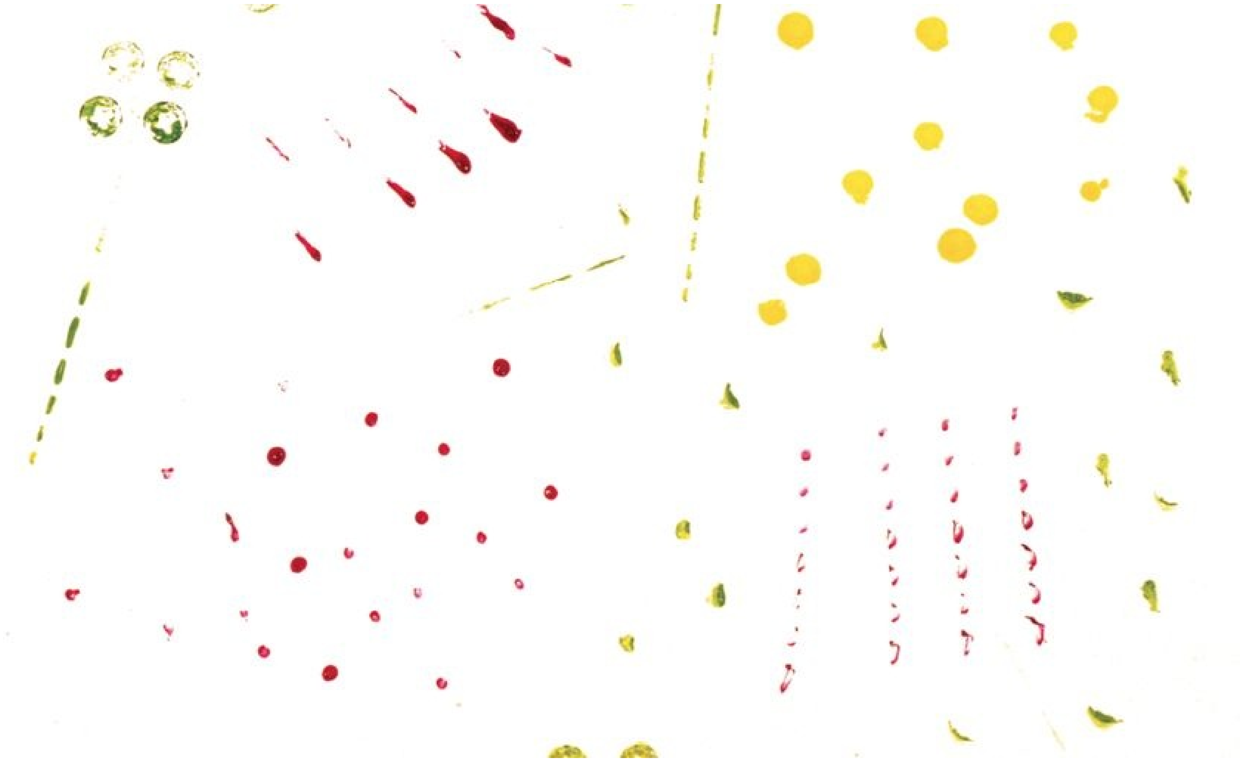
LINES AND MARKS

Simply put, a line is made by a point moving across the page or canvas.

A mark is the point itself. Lines and marks have a myriad of permutations and characteristics.



Lines



Marks

Painting Gear

Painting brings with it a variety of gadgets, gizmos and implements. Just about anything you can imagine can be used to paint with or upon. Don't worry too much about what you use; it's more important to just get started. Never, ever let the lack of a specific implement keep you from working. However, if you want to stock your studio, here are some suggestions.

PAINTBRUSHES

If you're just starting out, keep it simple and inexpensive. You don't need expensive brushes to make great art. Get a couple of artist's brushes if you like. I love to use brushes from the home improvement store because they are well made and they are big!

Paintbrushes

From left to right: a badger blender, great for making smooth layers of paint without a brushstroke; four different high-quality artist brushes; an inexpensive *set of white Taklon brushes from a hobby store; a housepainter's brush from a home improvement store.*

PAINT

I love to use Golden acrylics and all of the examples in this book are made with Golden. However, you can use whatever you have handy. In this book we are more focused on getting work done, not creating obstacles such as "I don't have the right paint, so I can't do the work." If you don't have the exact product I have listed, use something similar. If you like the examples and want to create them exactly, use the products listed with each example. Many excellent books have been written in greater detail about the multiple acrylic products that are available.

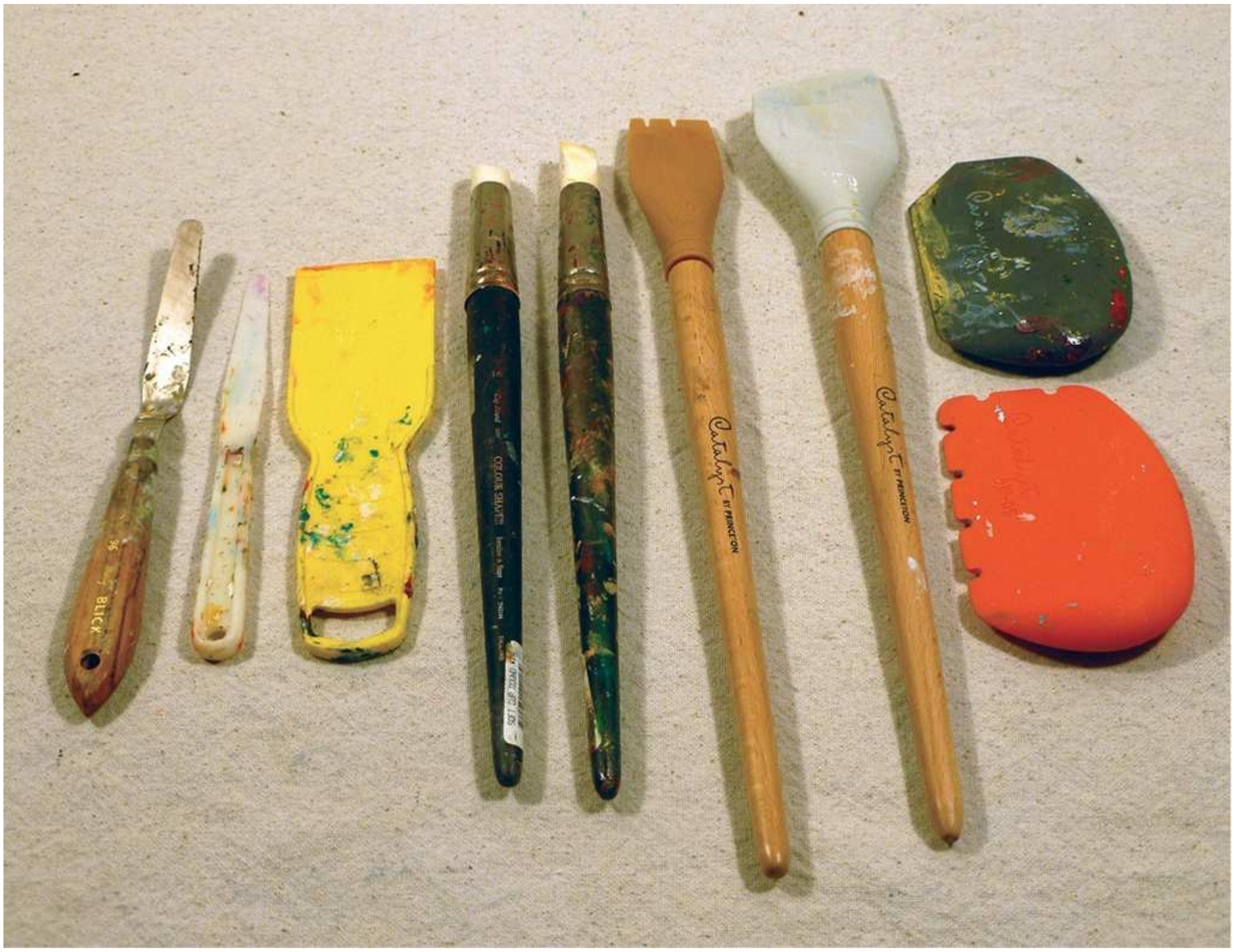
If you want to save your paint for another day, put a bit of Acrylic Glazing Liquid into it, mix it up and put it in a plastic container with a tight-fitting lid. Visit the Golden website (www.goldenpaints.com) for lots of information, videos and tip sheets.

Paint

Here are some examples of mediums, gels, fluid paint and heavy body paint. Also shown is Acrylic Glazing Liquid.

SCRAPERS AND PALETTE KNIVES

You can paint with just about anything. I’ve used rags, paper towels, sponges, postcards, plastic wrap, plastic forks and the edge of a cardboard box. You can also use paint scrapers and tools from the hardware store. I don’t care how you get the paint to the canvas or paper. Whatever works for you is perfect!

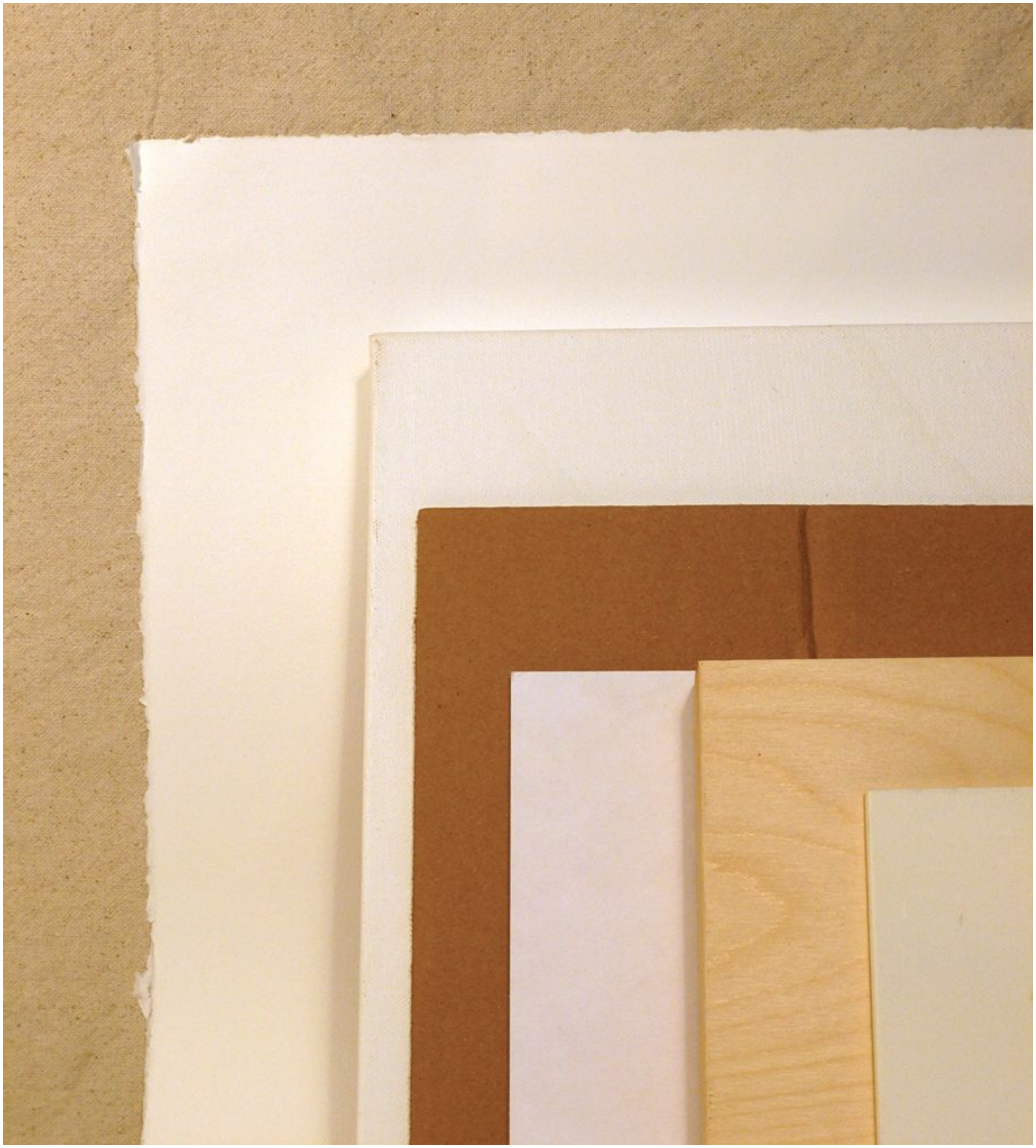


Scrapers and Palette Knives

From left to right: stainless steel palette knife and plastic palette knife, both from the art store; scraper from the hardware store, color shapers, Catalyst Blades.

SURFACES

Since all of the examples in this book are made with acrylic paint, there is a wide range of surfaces you can paint on. You can paint on cardboard, mat board, paper, the back of drawing pads, Masonite, plywood and canvas. Generally speaking, you want to use a surface that is not oily or waxy since acrylic paint does not adhere well to those surfaces. You also want to stay away from metals such as steel and aluminum because acrylic does not usually adhere well to these unless they have been prepared with a special primer.



Surfaces

From back to front: BFK printmaking paper, stretched canvas, corrugated cardboard, mat board, wood panel, Claybord.

ODDS AND ENDS

- Freezer paper and aluminum foil make great palettes as do garbage bags and plastic drop cloths. Whatever you use, your palette surface shouldn’t be too absorbent.
- Postcards are great for scraping paint on or off the surface or slathering layers of gel down.
- Soft rubber brayers make great marks and offset patterns.
- Cotton swabs do everything!
- Screwdrivers open jars and clean palettes. They also make great tools for carving into wet gel.
- Blue tape makes straight lines.
- Commercial stencils repeat shapes.

Odds and Ends

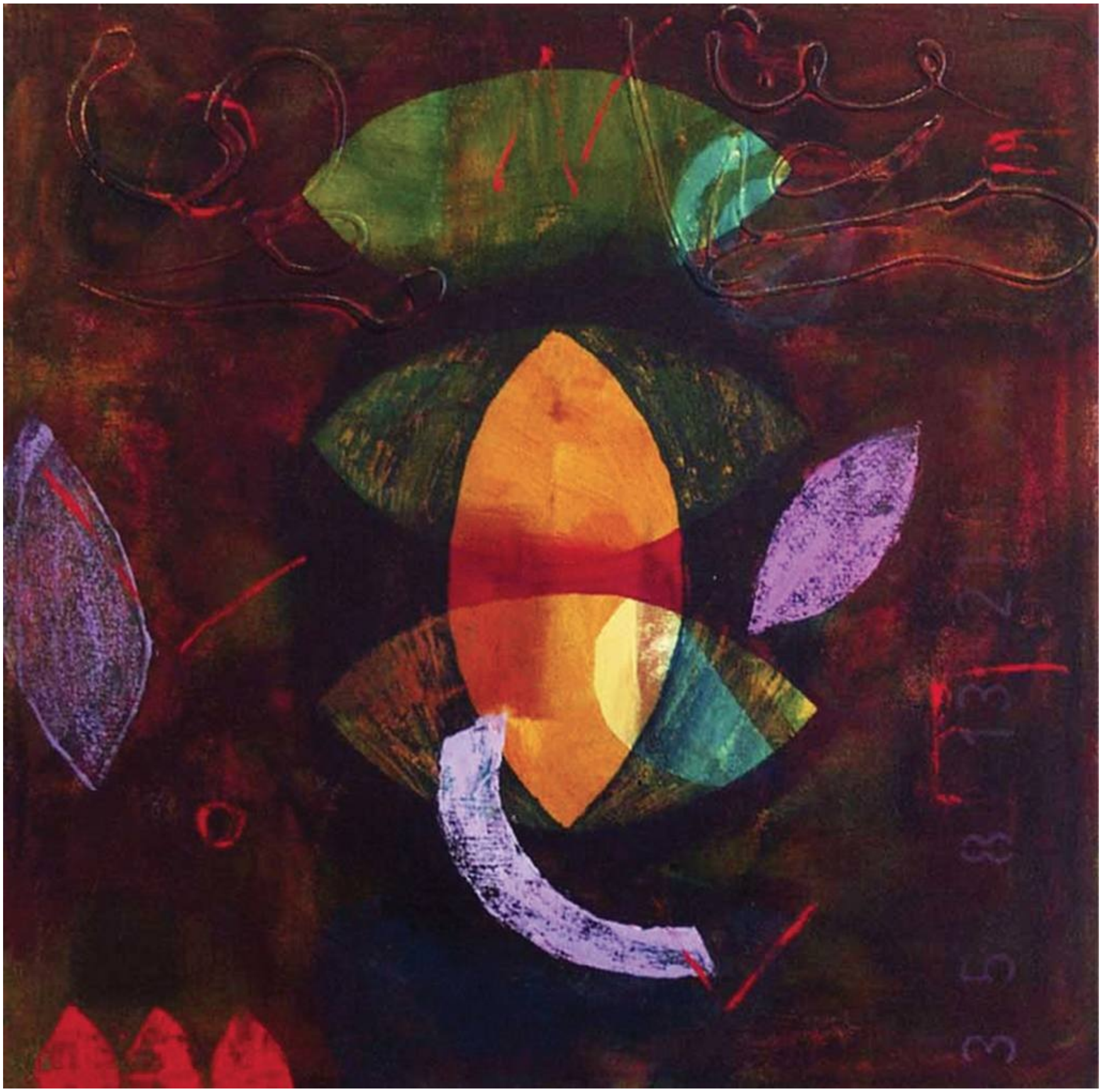
NOW… Forget all of that and have fun!

YOU CAN DO IT

ITALIA XVIIII Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 61" × 183" (155cm × 465cm)

Dos & Don’ts of Creative Play

- Forget the rules and have fun.
- Do find like-minded folks to play with.
- Do play without caring about the outcome.
- Do play often.
- Do make mistakes (lots of them!).
- Don’t worry about what anyone says.
- Don’t show your treasures to folks who don’t get it.
- Don’t tell yourself you’re too busy, old, unschooled, untalented, *etc.*
- Make lots of stuff.



ONE LOVE

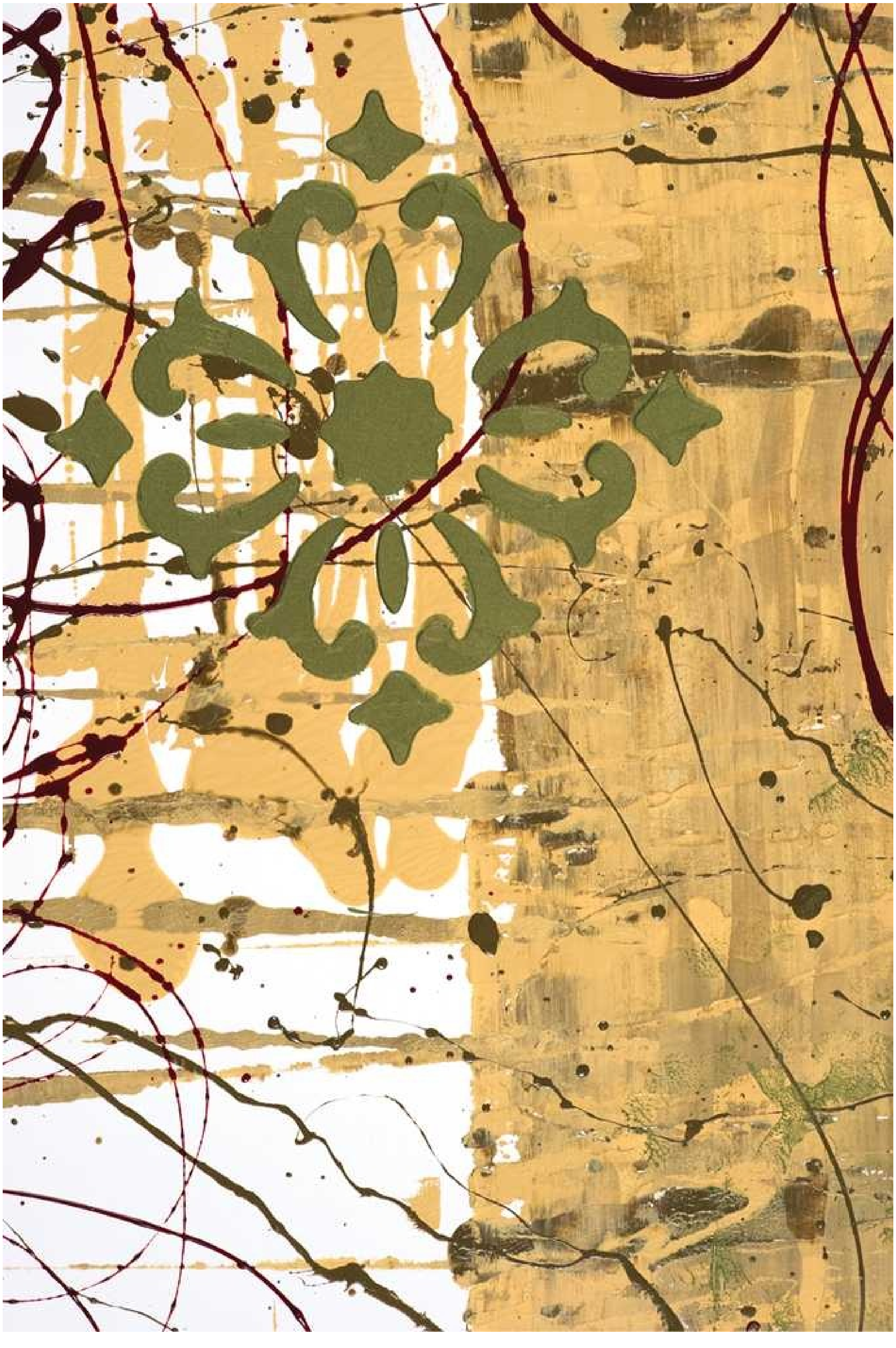
Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)

EXPLORATION ONE

Leaving Perfection Behind

What could be more fun than having a group of your pals over and painting? This exploration is a blast, and the techniques in this chapter will get all of you painting. One big obstacle will be put aside right away and that's the "it's precious" obstacle. When you treat your art as being too precious—making it too important or worrying too much about the outcome—it can be a killer to creativity. When you allow yourself to play and not worry about the result, you will not only have a good time, but you will also begin to make art that resonates with authenticity. Children do this all the time. And as Picasso said, for an artist the struggle is to "remain as a child."

"To be fond of learning is near to wisdom." —Confucius



ITALIA XIII

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on paper 22" × 30" (56cm × 76cm)

Dance, Paint, Dance

You can't get precious with this technique. So grab your inner child, some paper and some friends, turn the music up loud and let's have a paint party!

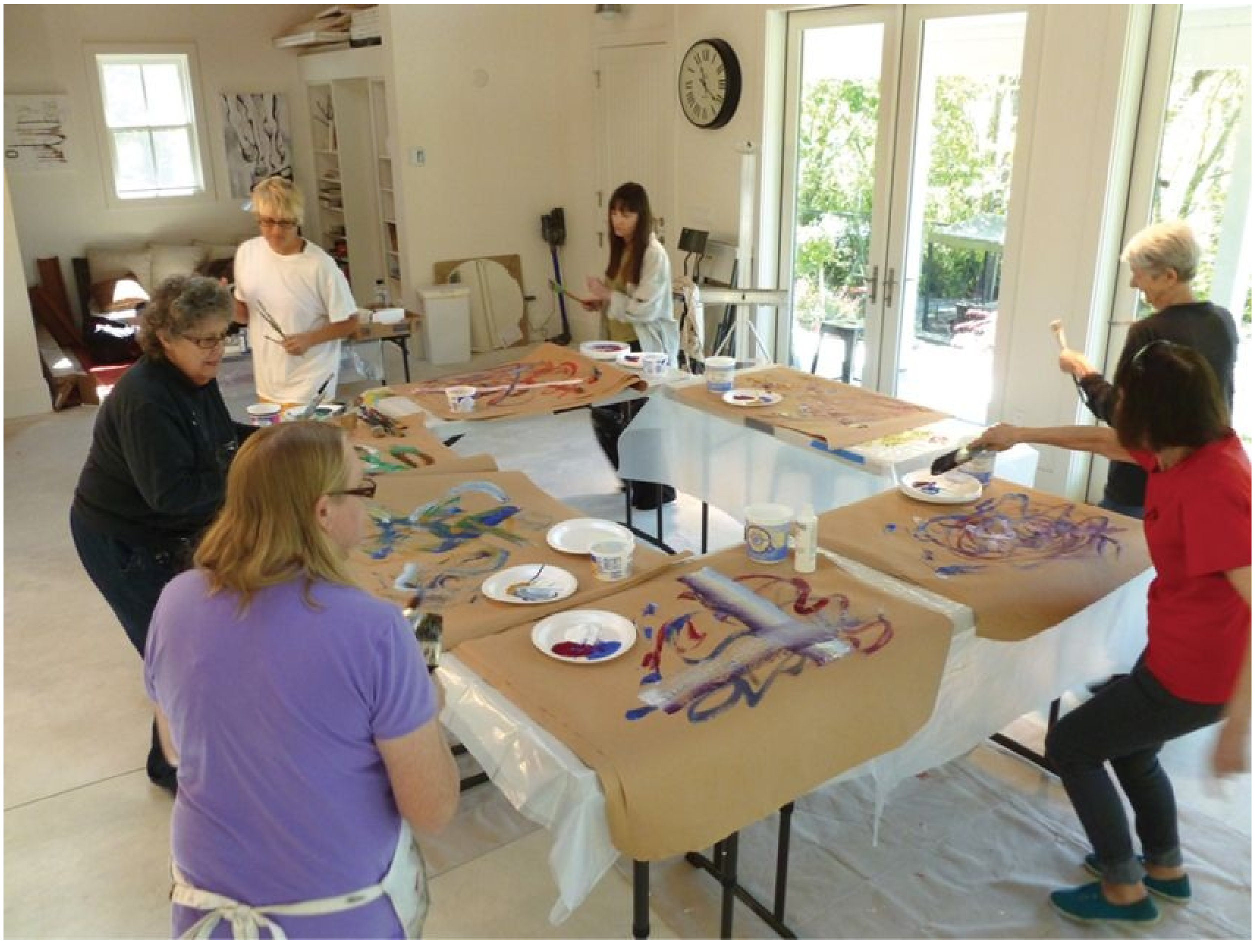
VERSION ONE: ACRYLIC ON KRAFT PAPER

Remember in the Getting Started chapter when I mentioned how much I love music? This technique takes advantage of what I think is a natural part of being human: dancing and music. No matter what kind of music you love, this technique will work. I've used every kind of music imaginable from Beethoven to Billy Joel. And as an added benefit, you'll burn a few calories!

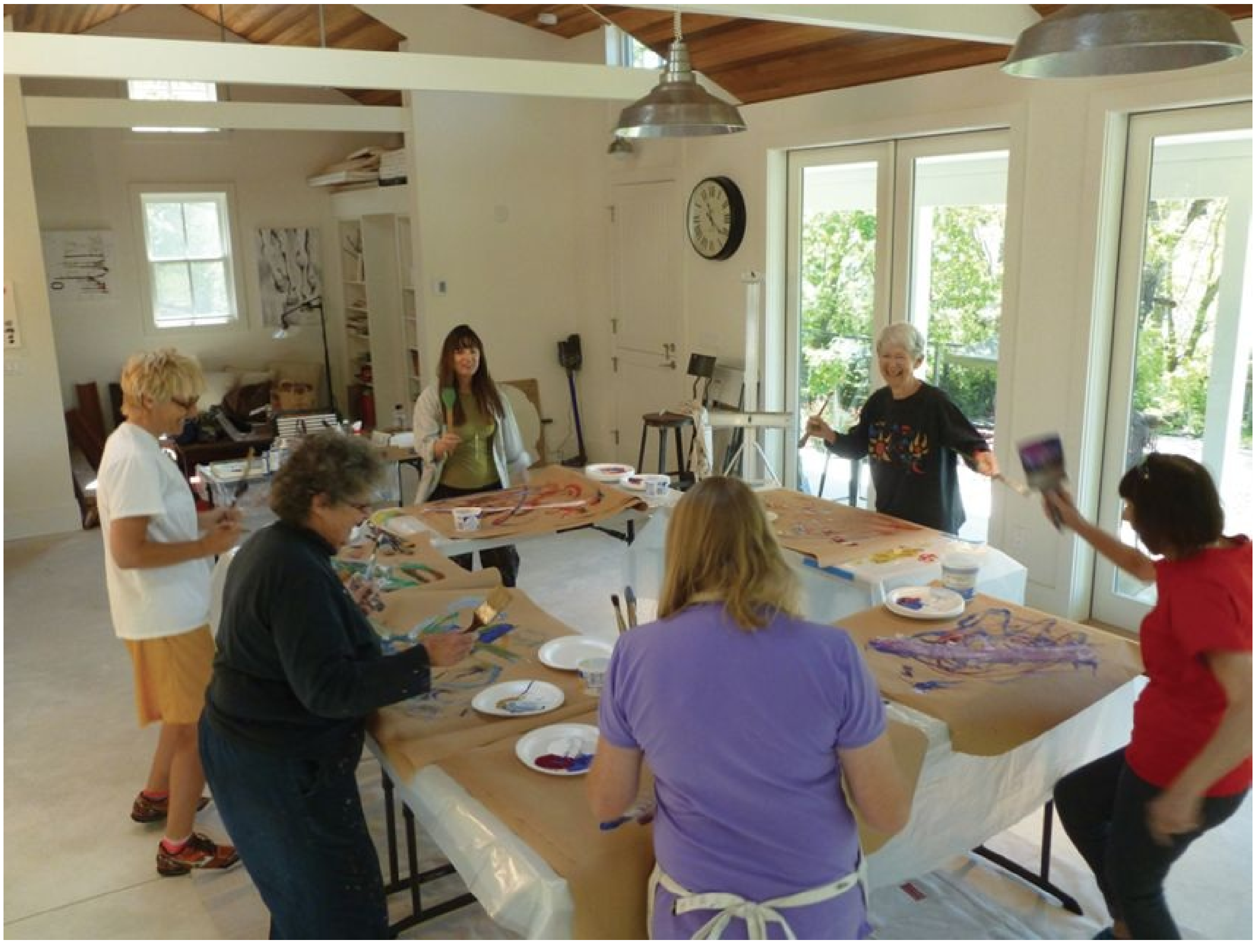
What You Need

Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
roll of kraft paper, torn into sheets (approx. 10 per person) Golden Fluid Acrylics, any colors paintbrushes, variety of sizes
water container
paper towels
paper plates for palettes
drop cloth for the floor

STEP 1 Set up some tables and cover the floor with a drop cloth. Give everyone a stack of kraft paper, some paint on a palette and a brush. Assign someone the task of timekeeper.

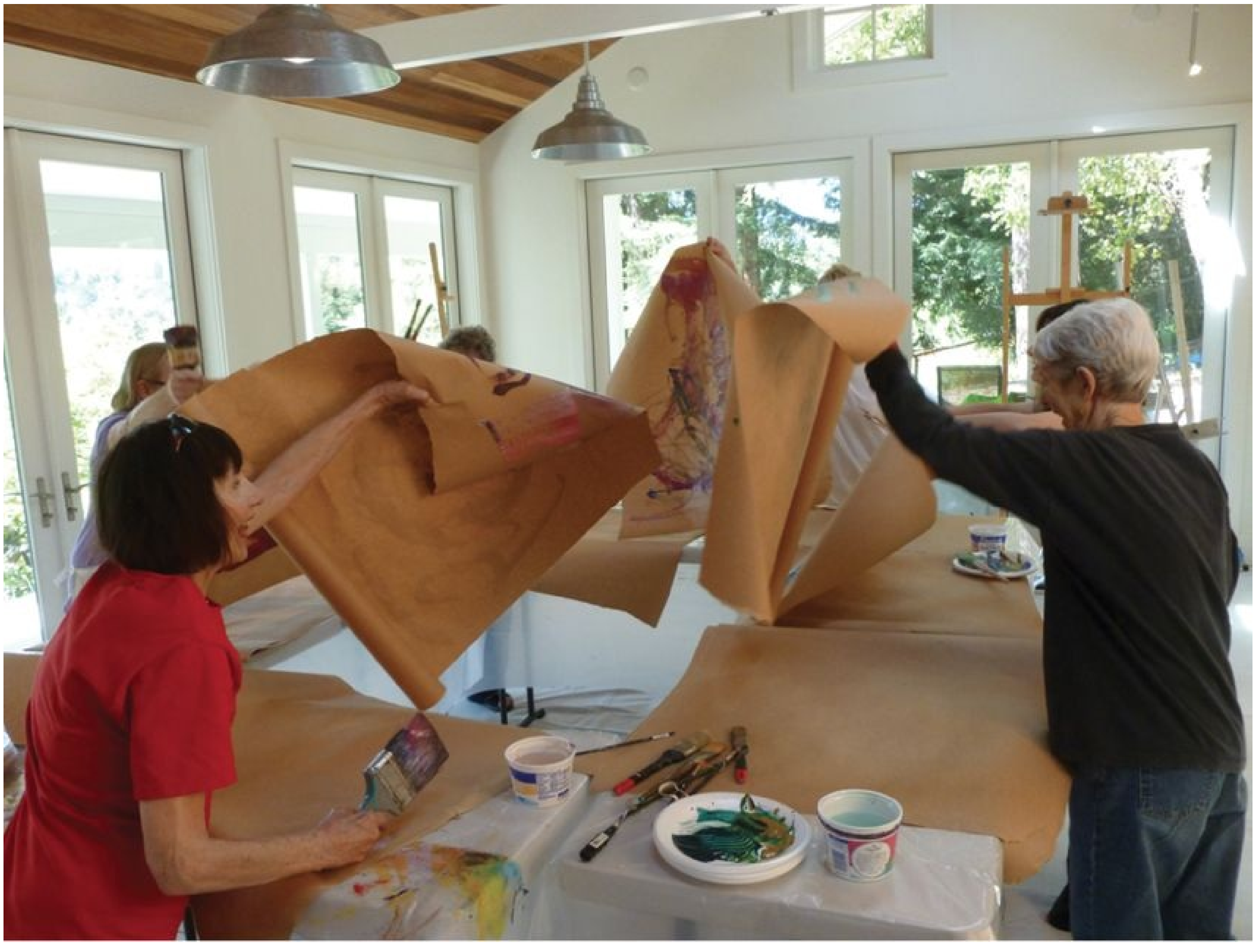


STEP 2 The timekeeper intermittently shouts “paint” and “dance” and “move to the right” about every minute or so. It’s very loose and doesn’t have to be exact. Get the music going and everyone starts painting.



STEP 3 Keep dancing and painting, moving from your spot to your neighbor’s. Take your paintbrush with you. Paint right on top of her paper. Be bold! Be brave! Let go!

STEP 4 Circle the tables as if you’re playing musical chairs. When the timekeeper shouts “paint” just start painting, right where you are. Keep dancing, painting and moving around the table.



STEP 5 When the paper is saturated with paint, toss it onto the drop cloth on the floor. Don’t worry if the papers land on top of each other, go face down on the drop cloth or get smeared. Stay with the process and have fun!

STEP 6 After about twenty minutes or so, everyone should take a break and get a drink of water. Now you can look at your treasures. Everyone should get together and divvy up the paintings on paper. And guess what? You won’t be able to tell which ones belong to you! You can tear these up and collage them to canvas just like the kraft paper bags in Exploration Nine or you can work on them further to create full-blown paintings on paper. You can then mount them on canvas (see Mounting Paper to Canvas or Panel).

VERSION TWO: ACRYLIC FLOW RELEASE ON CANVAS DROP CLOTH

Canvas drop cloths are relatively inexpensive and easy to find at just about any home improvement store. This is a great way to get some friends together and spend an afternoon!

Remember that you are painting and moving around the tables. You still need a timekeeper for this technique. Dance, paint a little, dance some more and move to the next spot on the table. Take your brush with you.

What You Need

Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
large canvas drop cloth
Golden Fluid Acrylics, any colors Golden Acrylic Flow Release
paintbrushes, a variety of sizes paper towels
paper plates for palettes
several water containers, yogurt containers or sturdy plastic cups several drop cloths for the floor

All About Acrylic Flow Release

Acrylic Flow Release, made by Golden, is a cool additive that makes water “wetter.” Why do you want to use it? Because it makes lovely puddles and saturates canvas with color like nothing else. It’s very effective to make rich stains on unprimed canvas.

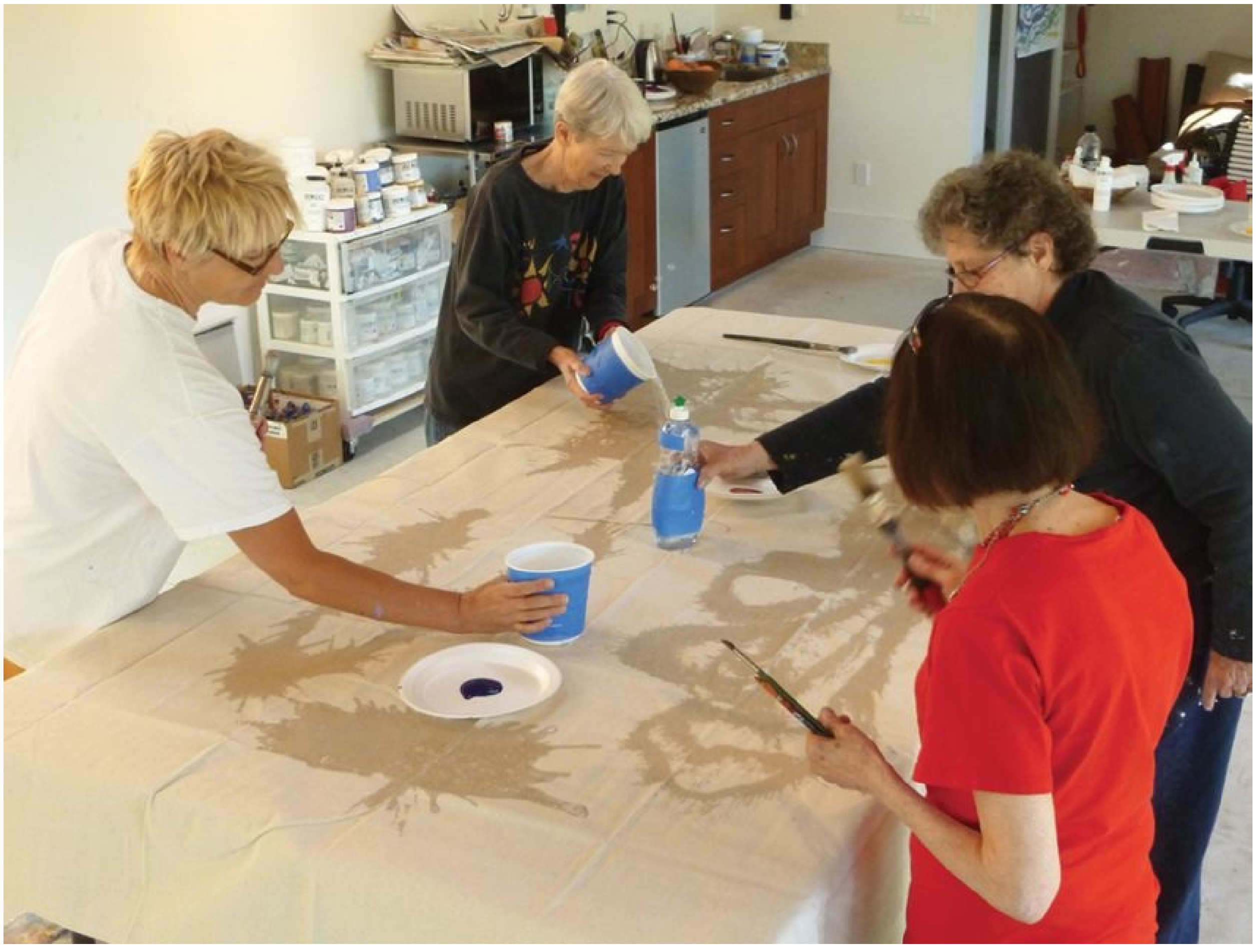
Never use Acrylic Flow Release full strength. It is a powerful surfactant and is meant to be diluted.

Make sure to use plastic cups or water containers. The water/Flow Release mixture will seep out of paper cups.

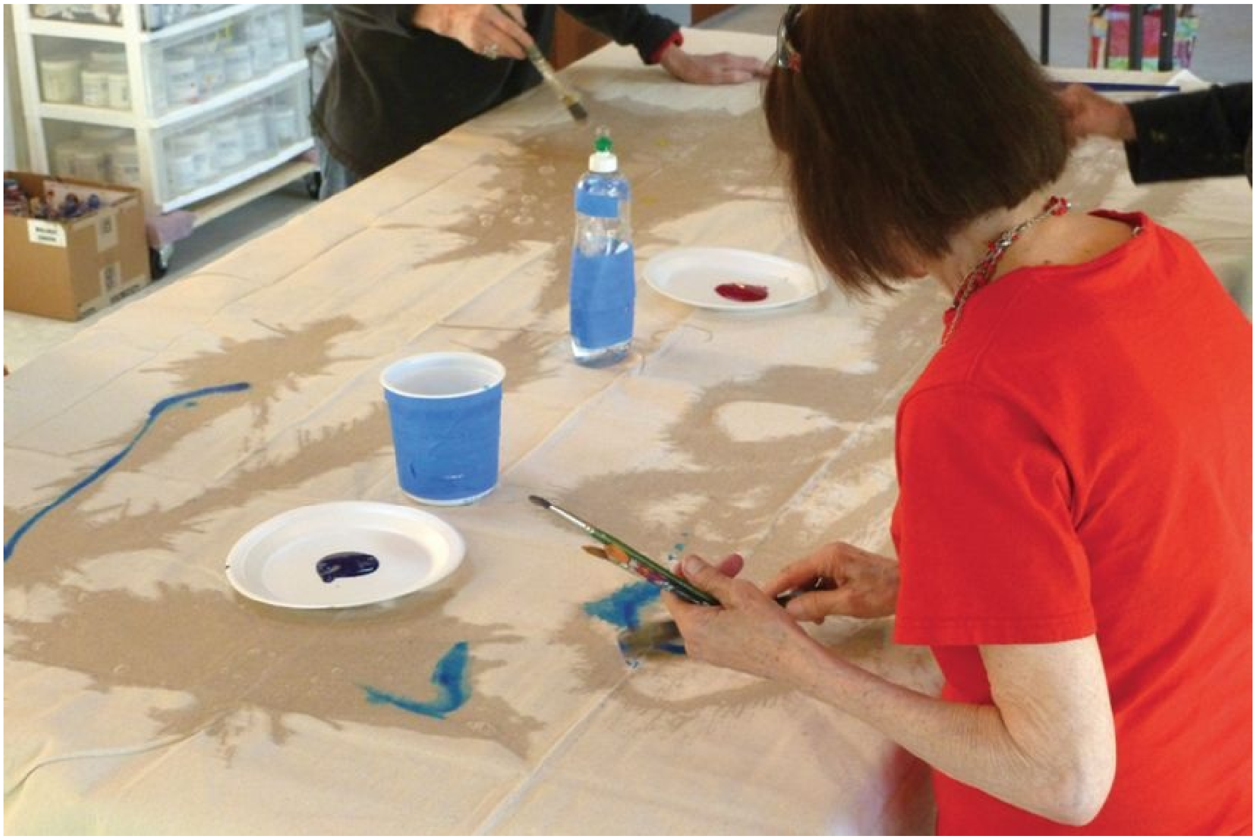
Read the label for proper safety precautions and proper use.

STEP 1 Acrylic Flow Release can be mixed with any fluid paint to make a thin, watery paint that is ideal for staining raw canvas.

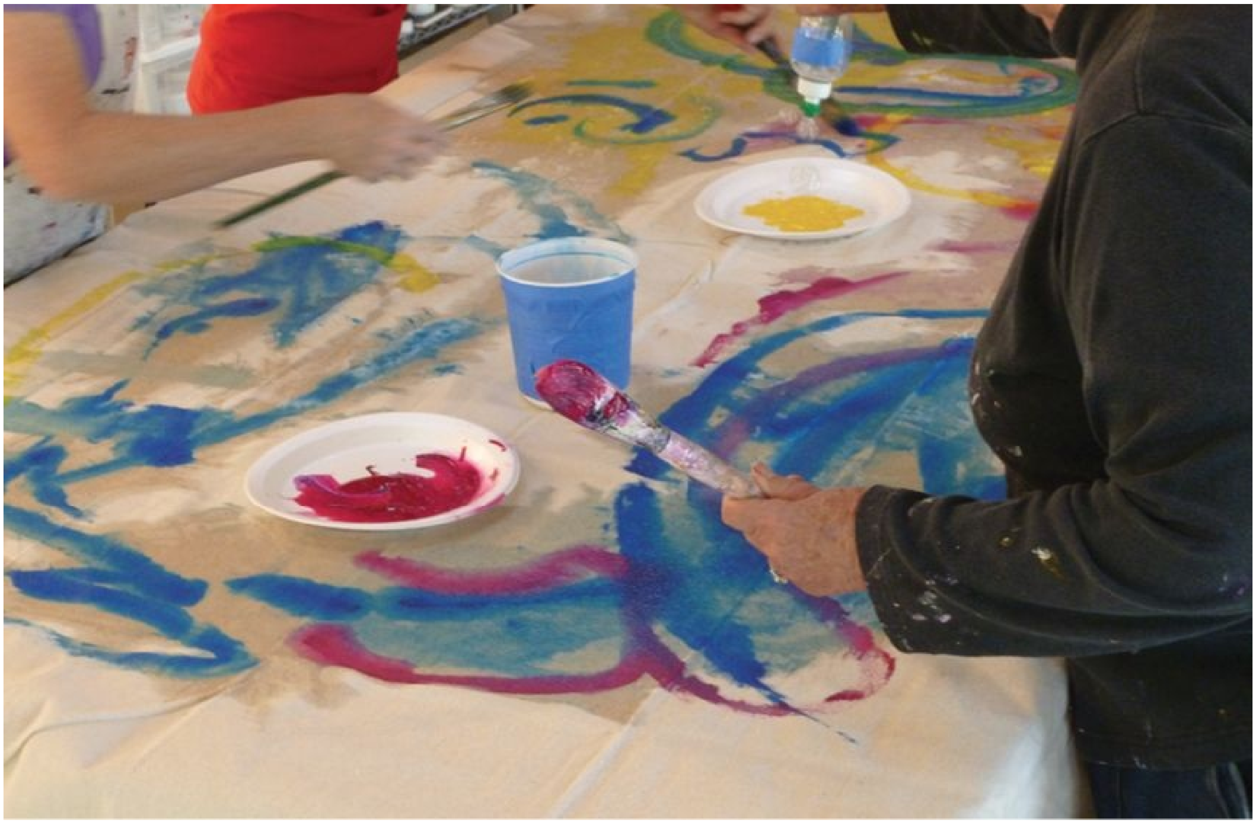
Mix 3 teaspoons of Acrylic Flow Release with one quart of water. This is your base mixture. Make up several containers of this water/Flow Release mixture so everyone can have their own container. You can use the water/Flow Release mixture as is or add fluid paint to it to make a premixed watery paint.



STEP 2 Set up the tables with plastic drop cloths beneath them. Some of the water may seep onto the floor, so be prepared with heavy drop cloths on the floor or even work outside. Give everyone a container of the water/Flow Release mixture. Start pouring this mixture onto the raw canvas.

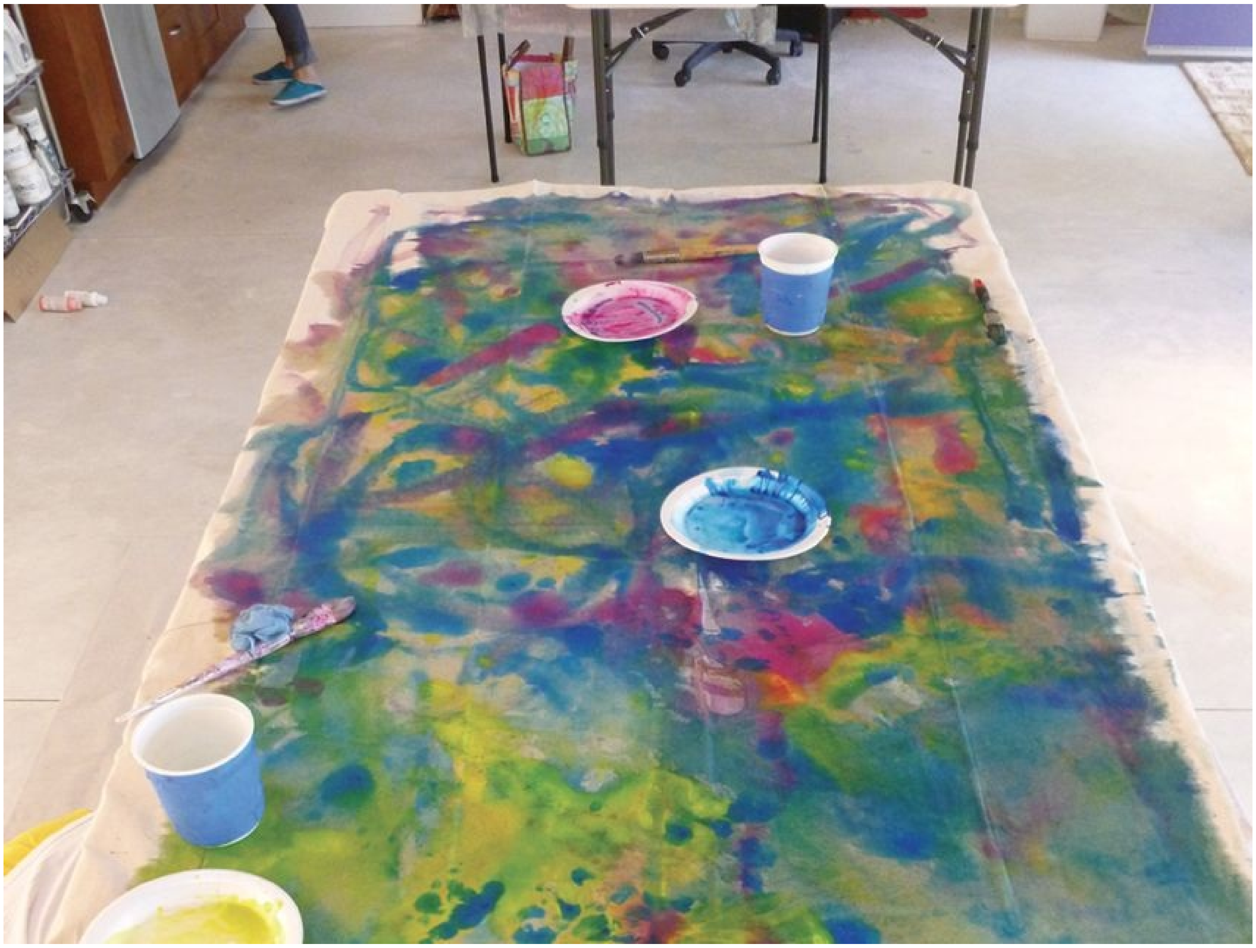


STEP 3 Take a small amount of fluid paint and float it onto the canvas that has been pre-wet with the water/Flow Release mixture.

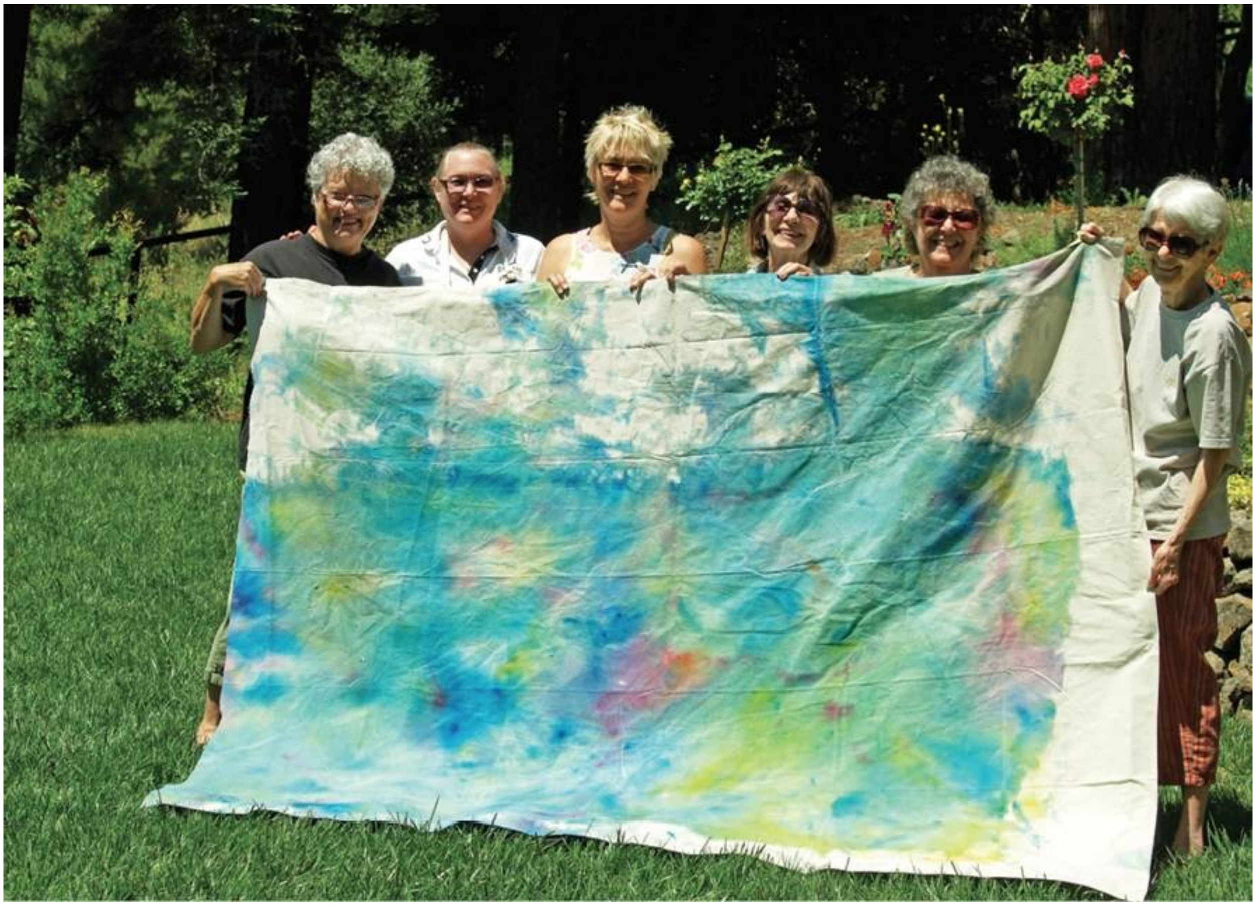


STEP 4 You can also mix fluid paint with the water/Flow Release mixture and then paint it onto the canvas. Work with just two to three colors. In this photo we are using only Quinacridone Magenta, Hansa Yellow and Phthalo Blue (Green Shade). Keep your use of paint to a minimum. You can always add more later if you feel that the color needs to be more saturated.

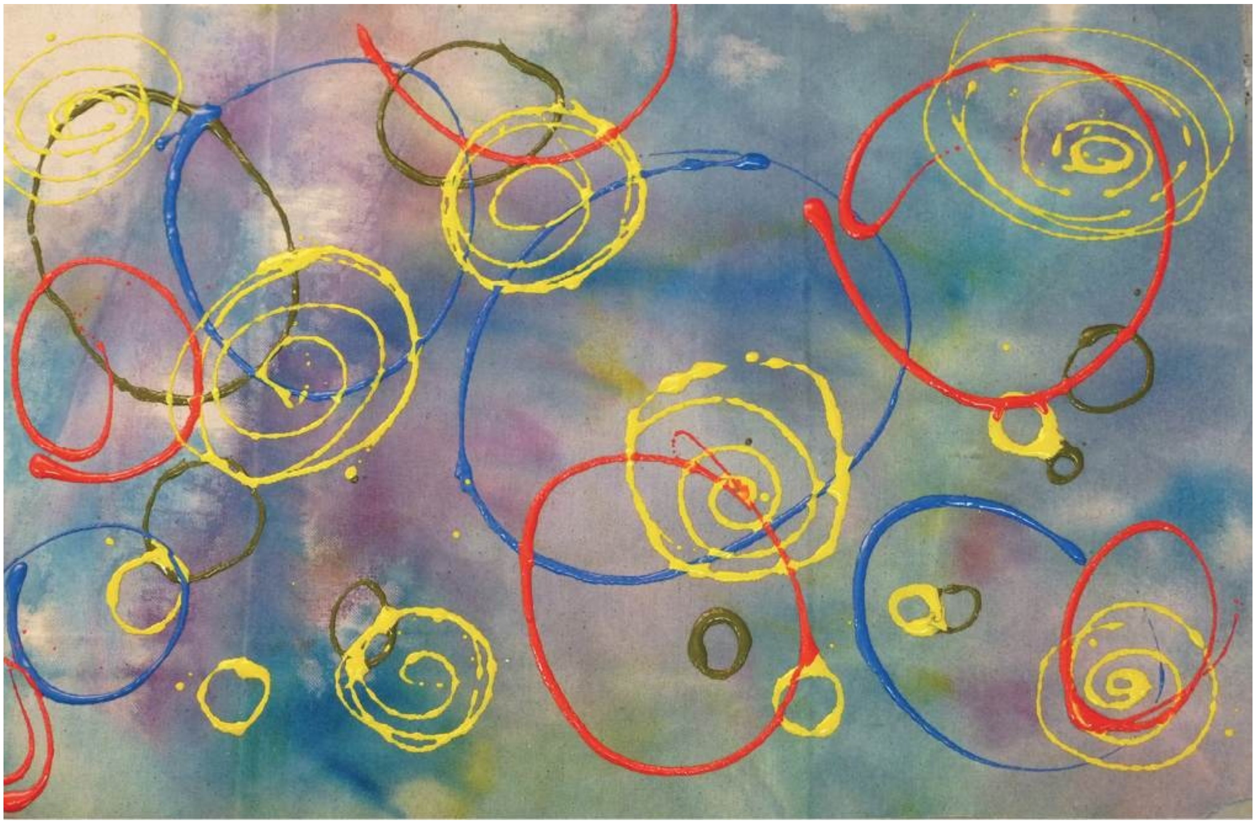
STEP 5 Paint and dance around the canvas just like you did in Version One. Since the paint is thin and watery, you can really fling it with a brush. Just don’t fling it in your neighbor’s eyes!



Here’s what the canvas looked like after a session of painting with Acrylic Flow Release.



Here's the gang with their completed drop cloth. From left to right: Tesia Blackburn, Elise Marshall, Tina Pressler, Ruth Brophy, Lynn Glynn and Jackie Carroll. We will divvy up the drop cloth by cutting big chunks and giving one to each artist. Each artist will finish the canvas to her own liking using fluid paint, collage materials, oil pastel or whatever. The sky really is the limit.



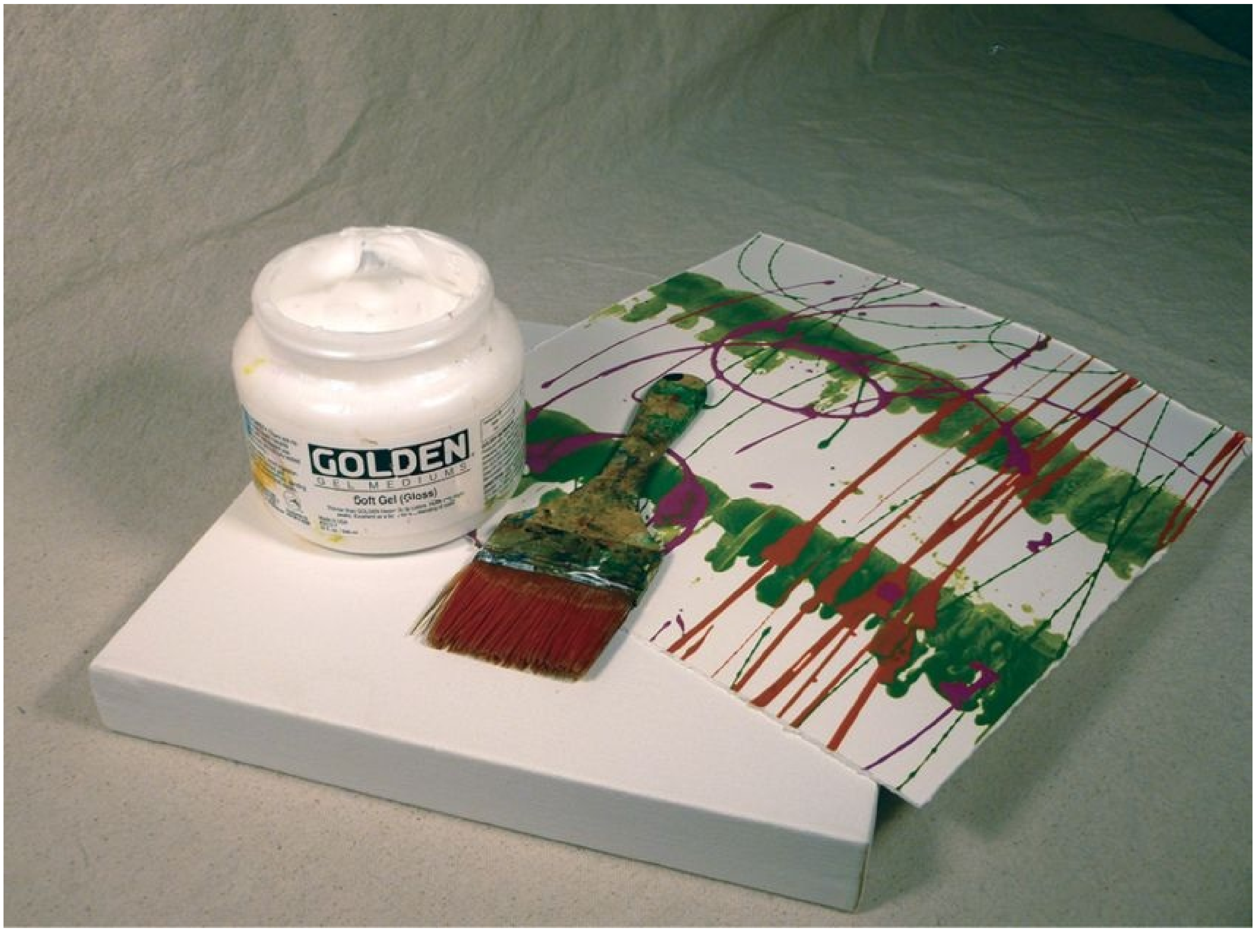
A piece of the canvas with some additional painting. Of course you can do this all by yourself as well and have several big pieces of canvas to play with. Imagine!

Mounting Paper to Canvas or Panel

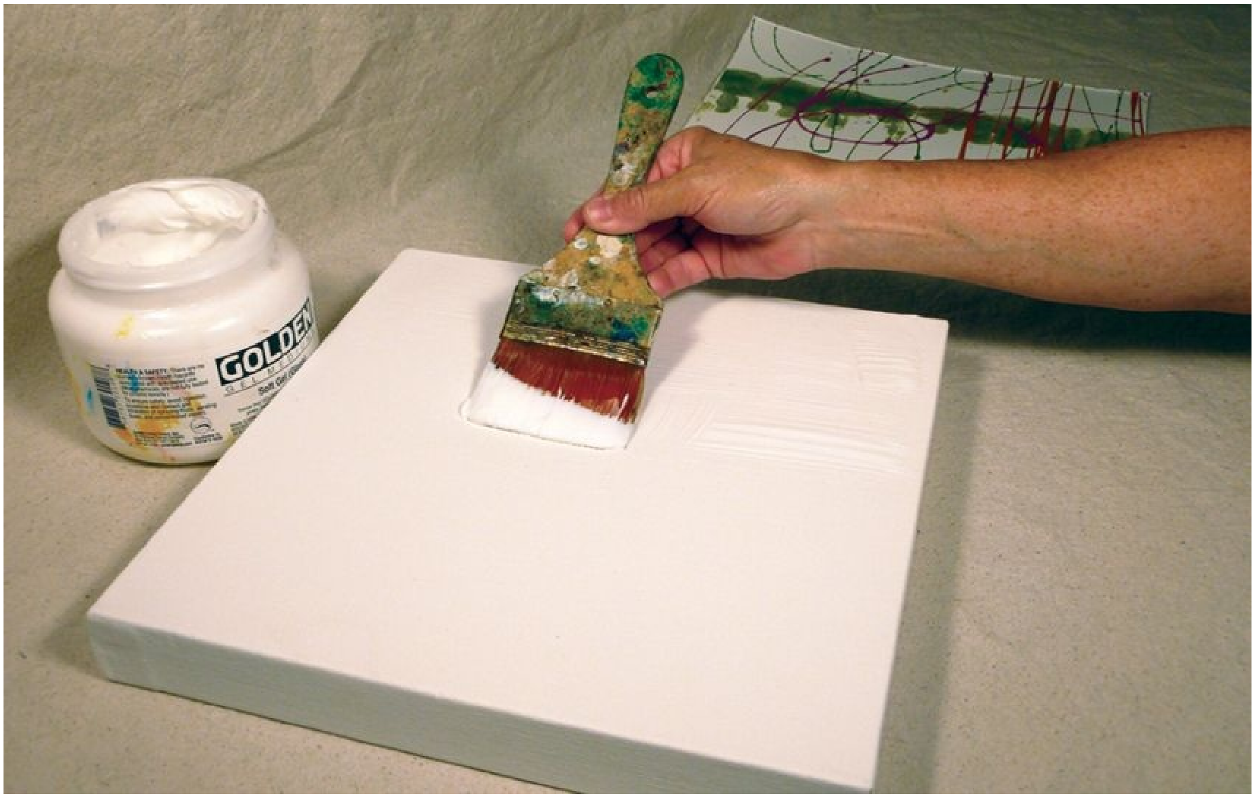
This is easier than you think and can come in quite handy. Just think, you have a great piece on paper and you don’t want to frame it. Simply mount it to canvas or panel. If the paper is completely covered with acrylic gel or paint, the paper is protected and you need do nothing further. If you have exposed paper after you’ve mounted it to canvas, just cover the paper with a layer of Soft Gel Gloss (gloss gel) to protect it. Always test your surface if you think there may be water-soluble materials involved. You can always spray it with a little fixative before you put on a layer of gloss gel. This will protect any water-soluble materials from smearing.

What You Need

canvas or panel, slightly smaller than your art Golden Soft Gel Gloss
3" (8cm) brush
large plastic heavy-duty garbage bag craft knife
blanket or thick towel boards and weights such as books or bricks

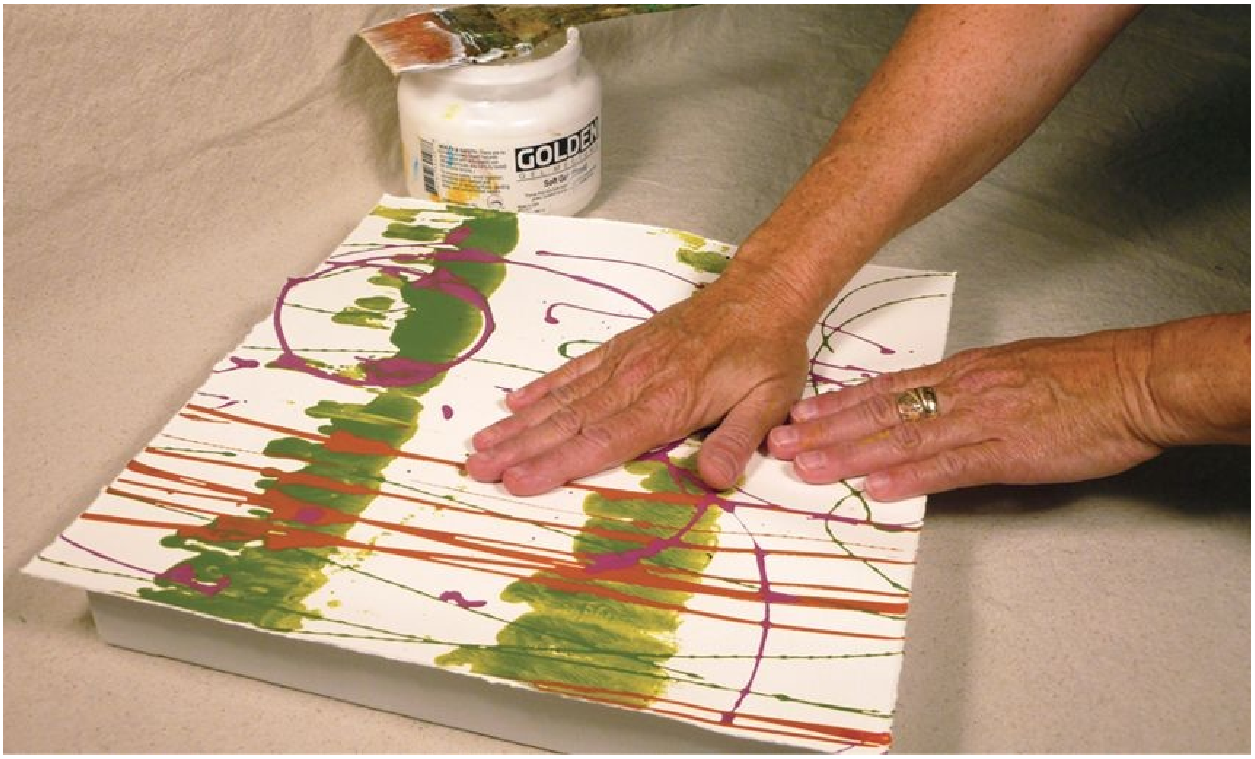

GOLDEN
GEL MEDIUMS
Soft Gel (Gloss)

STEP 1 Your canvas should be slightly smaller than the paper you want to mount on it. Here I am using a 12" × 12" (30cm × 30cm) canvas for a painting on paper that is 13" × 13" (33cm × 33cm).

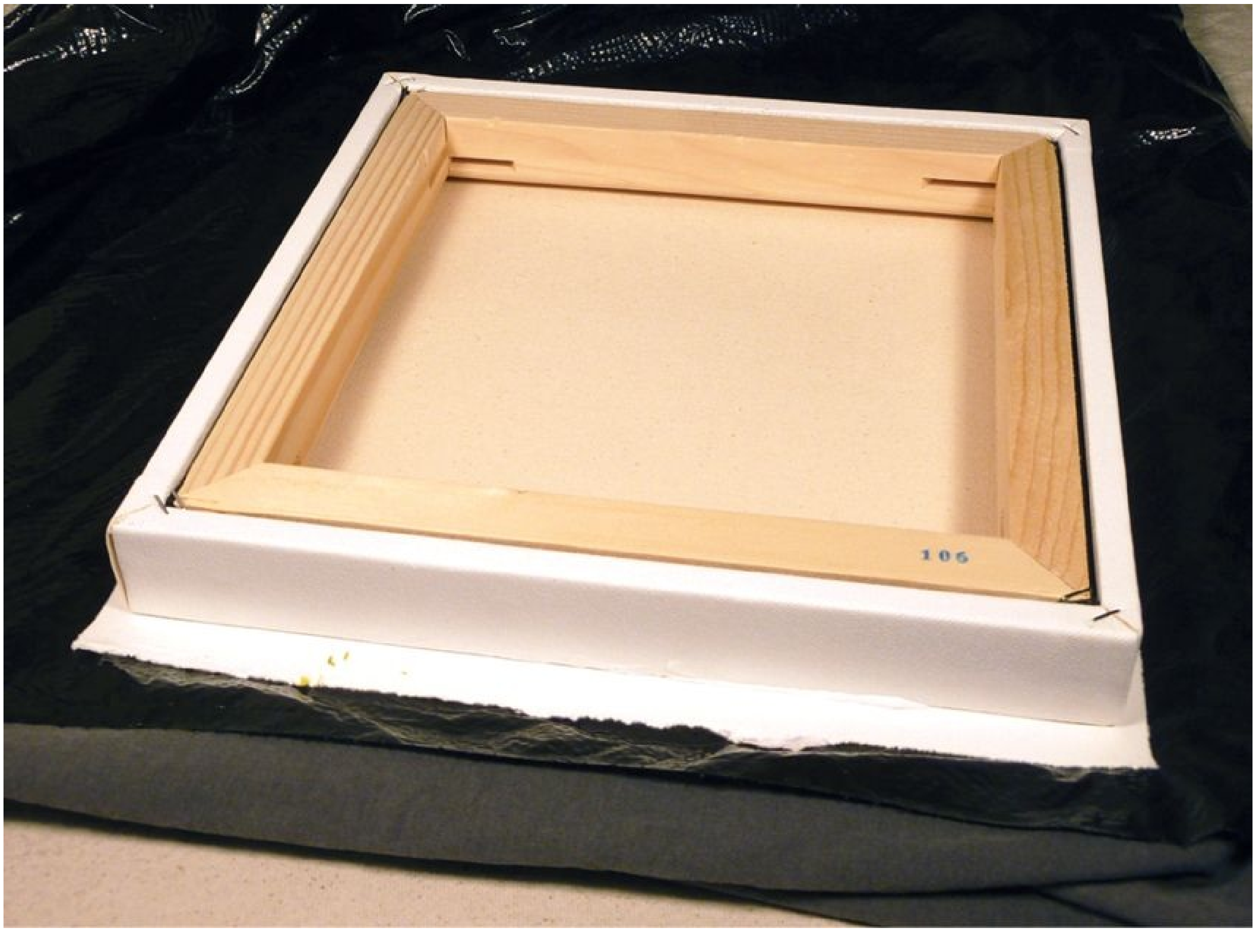


STEP 2 Spread a liberal layer of gloss gel on the canvas.

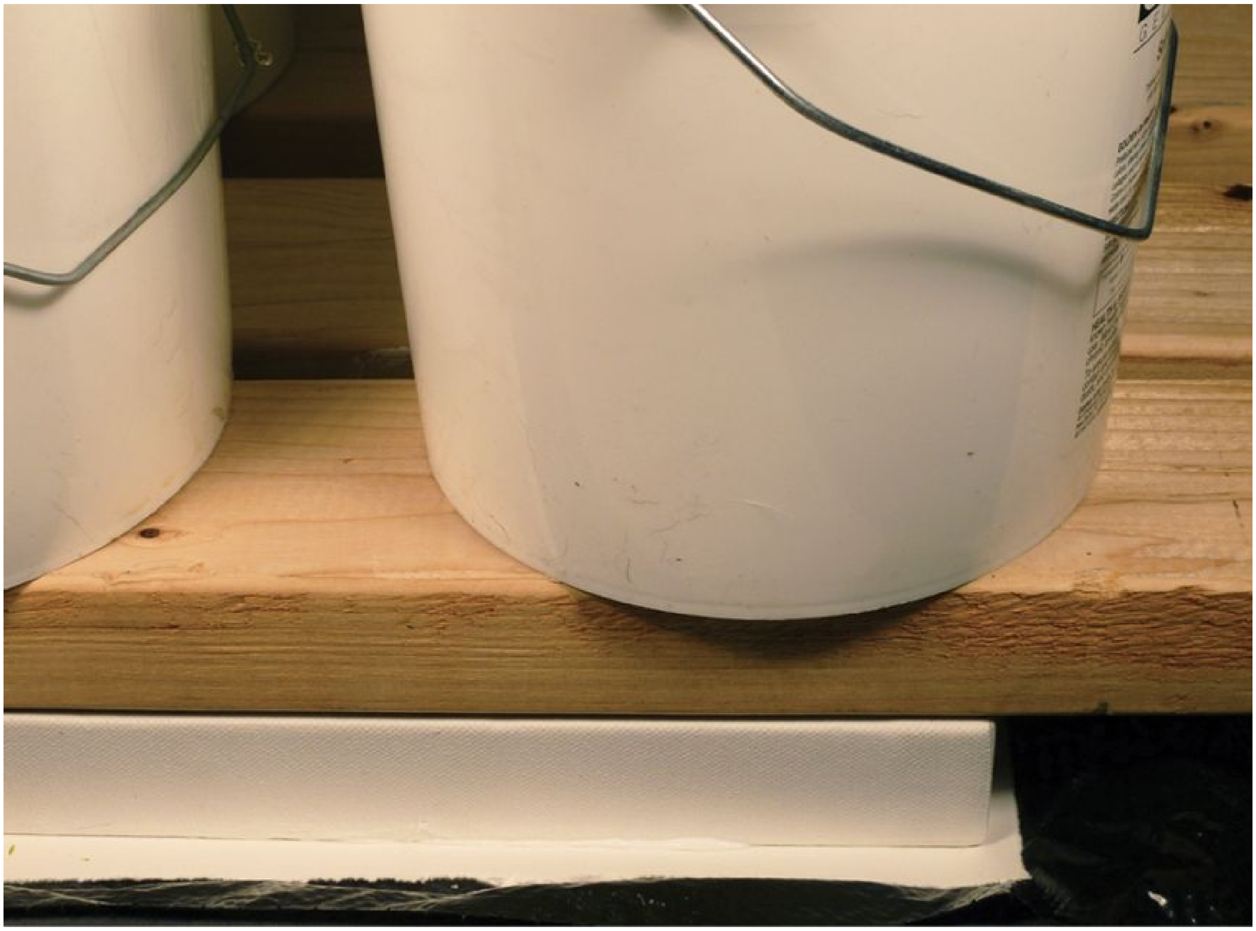
STEP 3 While the gloss gel is wet, gently lay the paper down onto the canvas. You have time to reposition it if needed.



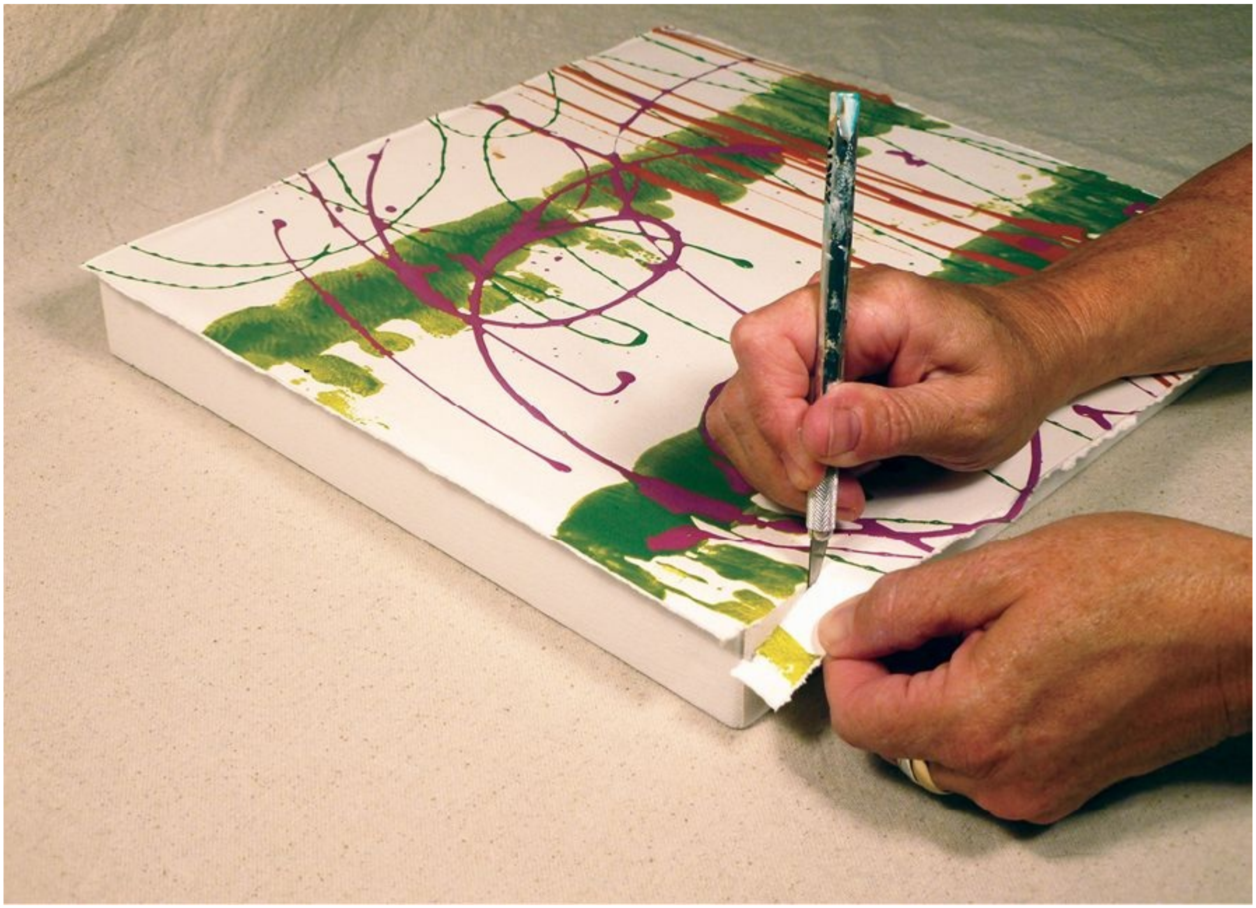
STEP 4 Starting at the center of the canvas, gently burnish the paper down, moving any air bubbles out from the center.



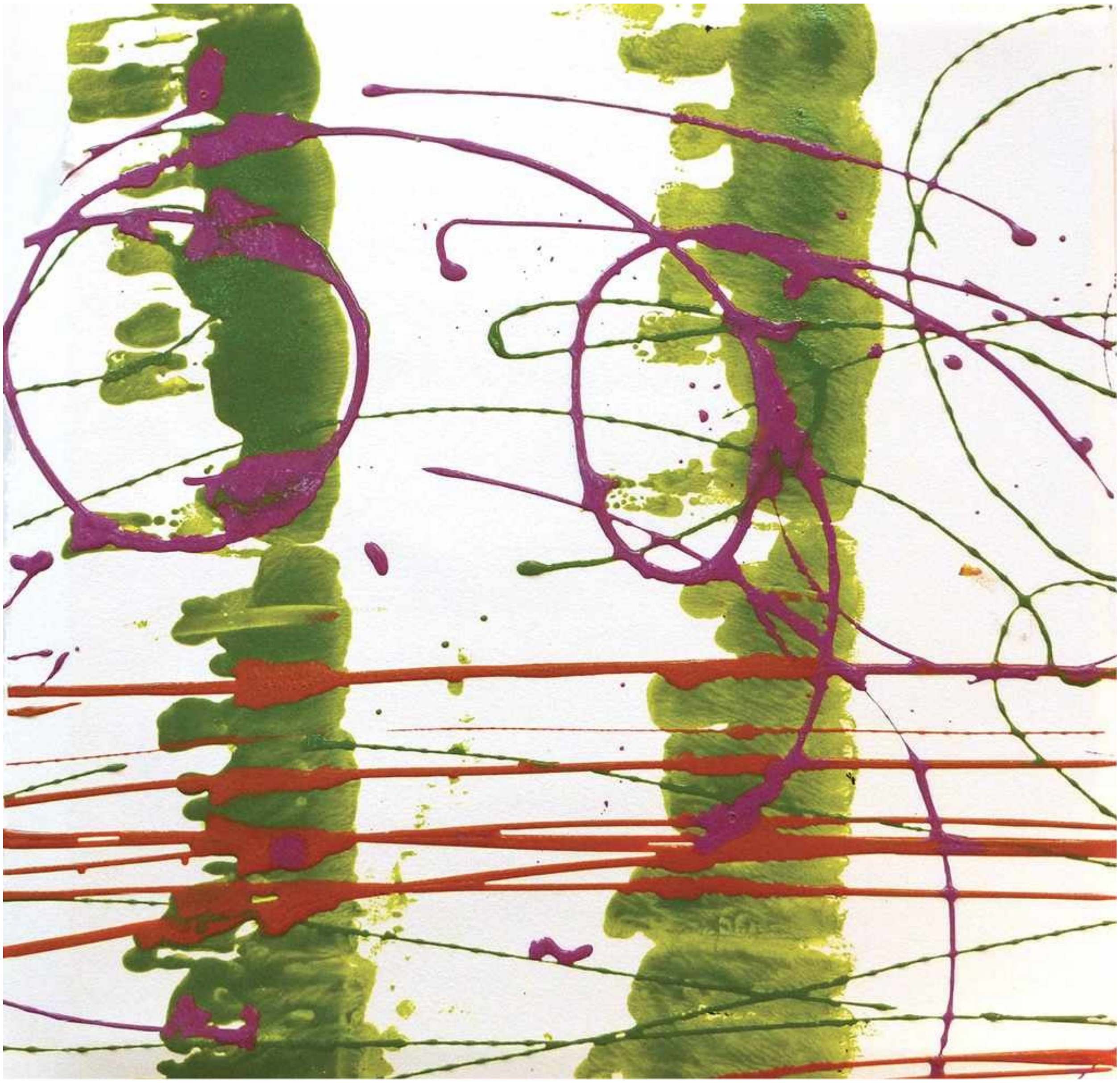
STEP 5 Lay a blanket or thick towel down onto a table and cover with a black heavy-duty garbage bag made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE). Most commercial garbage bags are made from HDPE but double-check to be sure. Acrylic will not adhere to HDPE, so it’s the perfect surface to lay the canvas on, face down.



STEP 6 Using boards, cover the entire back of the canvas and weight it with books, paint buckets or other heavy objects. Take care to ensure that the entire back of the canvas is weighted evenly and all four corners are weighted. Leave overnight to dry.



STEP 7 Once the canvas/paper combo has dried overnight, you can trim the excess paper with a craft knife.



The finished piece on paper, mounted on canvas. This is an easy way to present work on paper without framing.

SPRING FLING

Tesia Blackburn

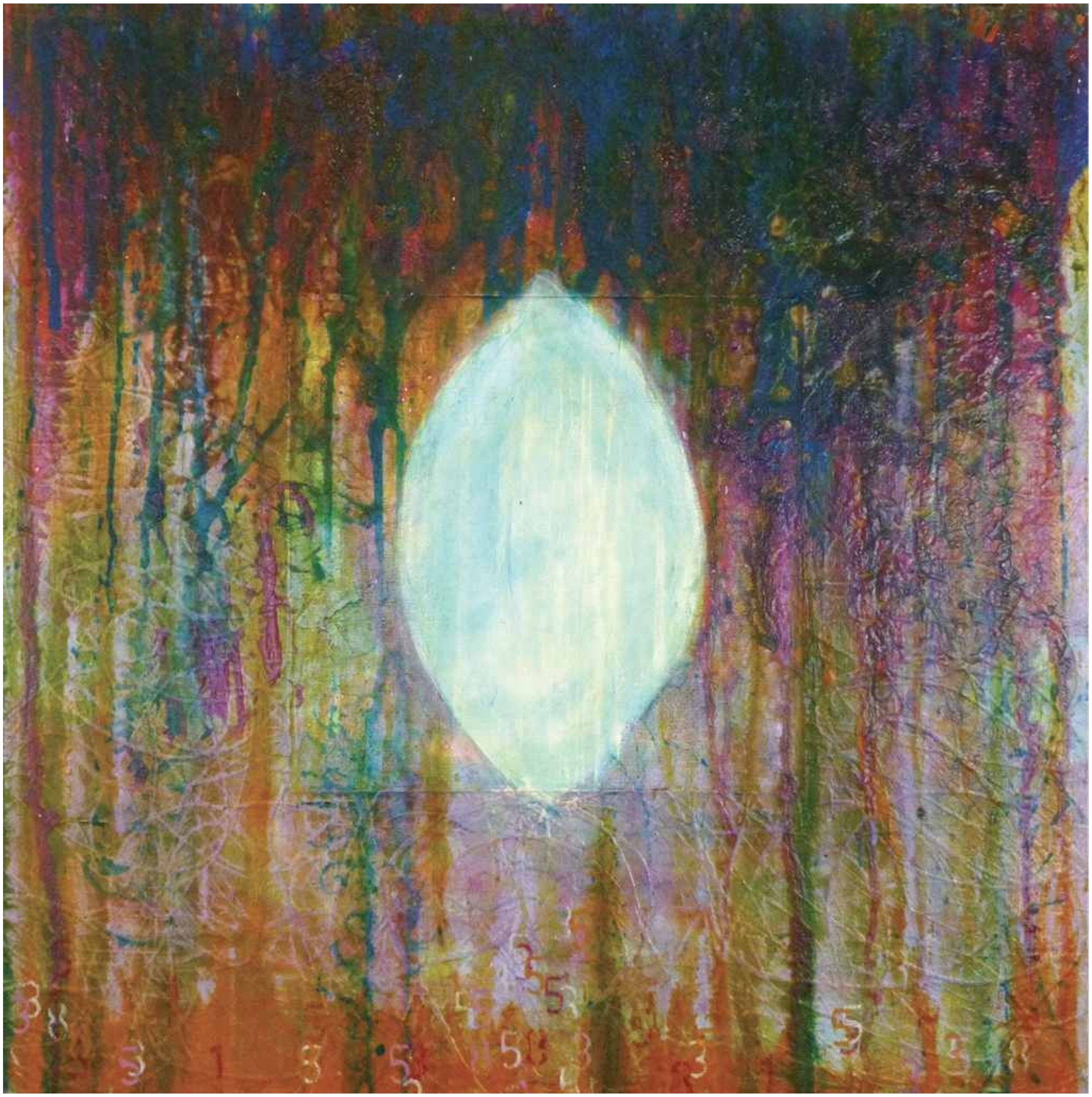
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas 12" × 12" (30cm × 30cm)

EXPLORATION TWO

Speed Painting

When you’re stuck creatively, it can feel like an insurmountable obstacle to get something done. Pulling out the paint, setting up an easel, gathering up brushes… it’s time-consuming, right? But what if you needed only twenty minutes and a minimal setup to get ten paintings started? Really!

“The more you work, the more good work you will do.” —Paul Russo



SACRED LOVE XXV

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)

Ten Paintings Right Now

You can start ten paintings in twenty minutes without much fuss at all. Sometimes just having a few minutes will do the trick and get the pump primed if you’re stuck. And you may find a hidden nugget or two in these quick paintings. Then you have something to develop into a full-blown painting.

You may also find that it doesn’t take that long to create something really wonderful that needs no further work at all. When asked how long it took him to paint *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, which measures nearly 7' × 10' (2m × 3m), Robert Motherwell is said to have replied, “Twenty years and twenty minutes.”

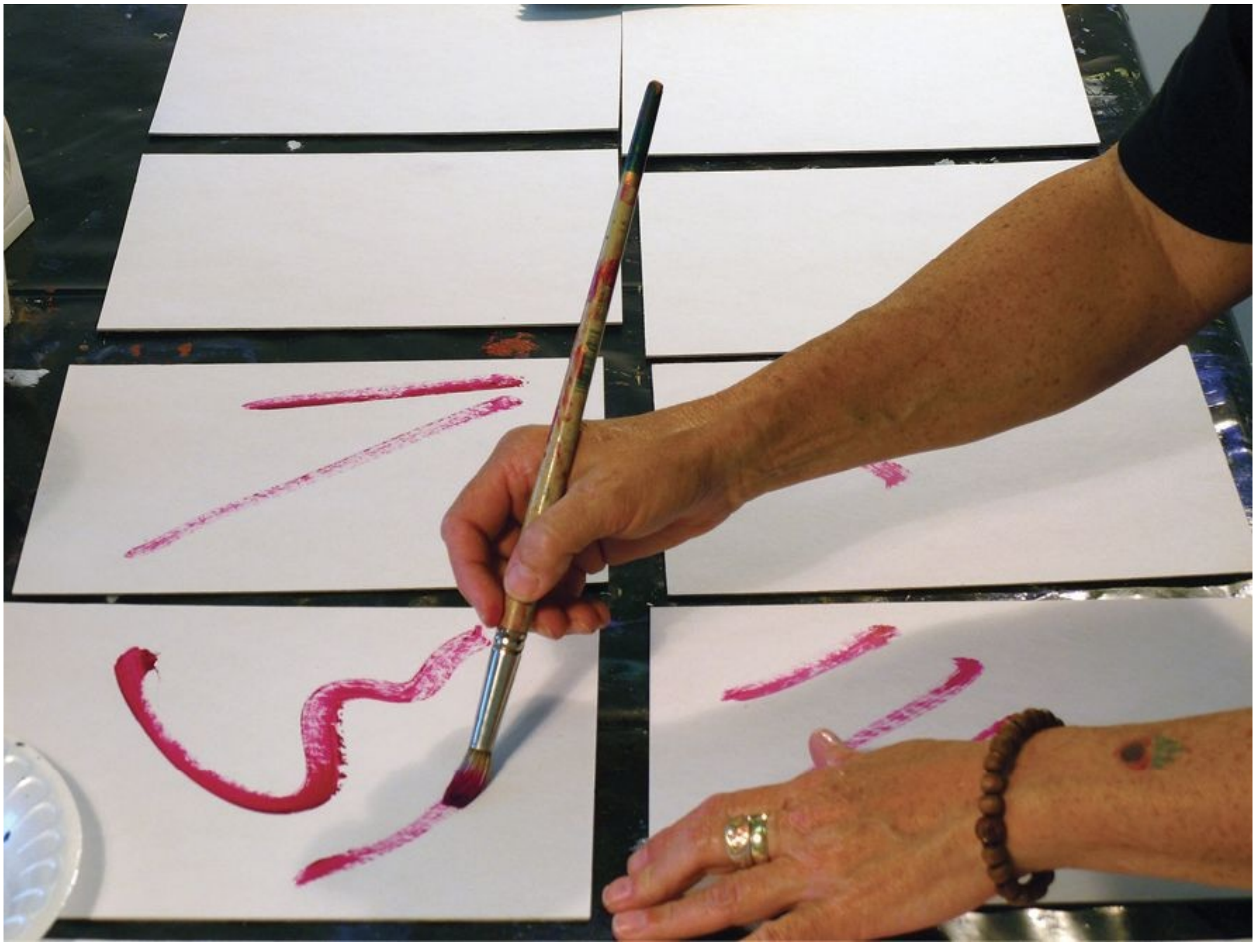
Ten paintings, right now! Here’s how.

What You Need

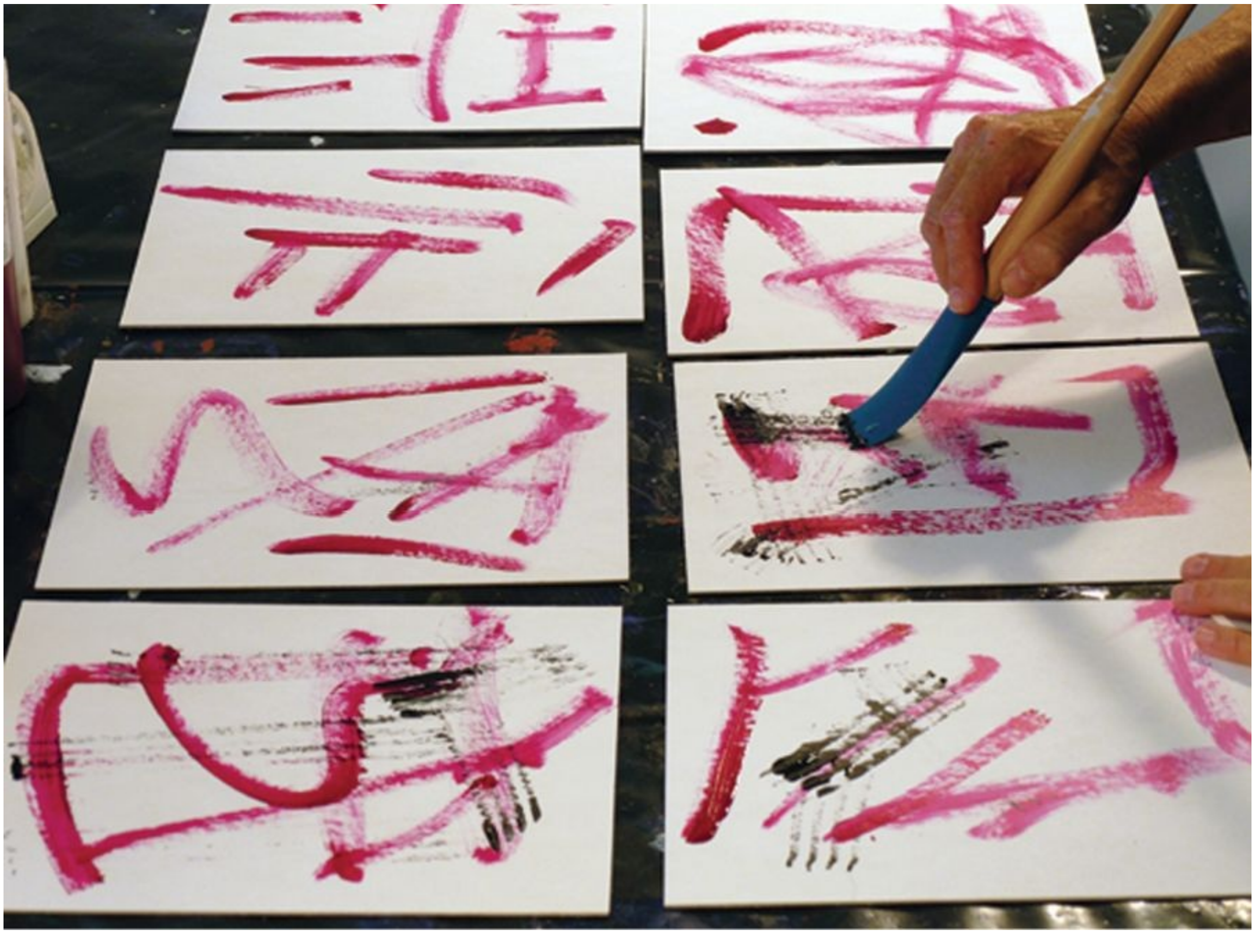
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20 minutes
assorted paintbrushes
mat board, bristol board or heavy watercolor paper 8"× 10"–11"× 14" (20cm × 25cm–28cm × 36cm), 10 pieces
fluid paint, one color plus black and white
palette (foam plates, aluminum foil, palette paper or freezer paper all work equally well)
various line makers (forks, Catalyst Blades, old credit cards, etc.)
paper towels
water container
egg timer

VERSION ONE: LINES ONLY

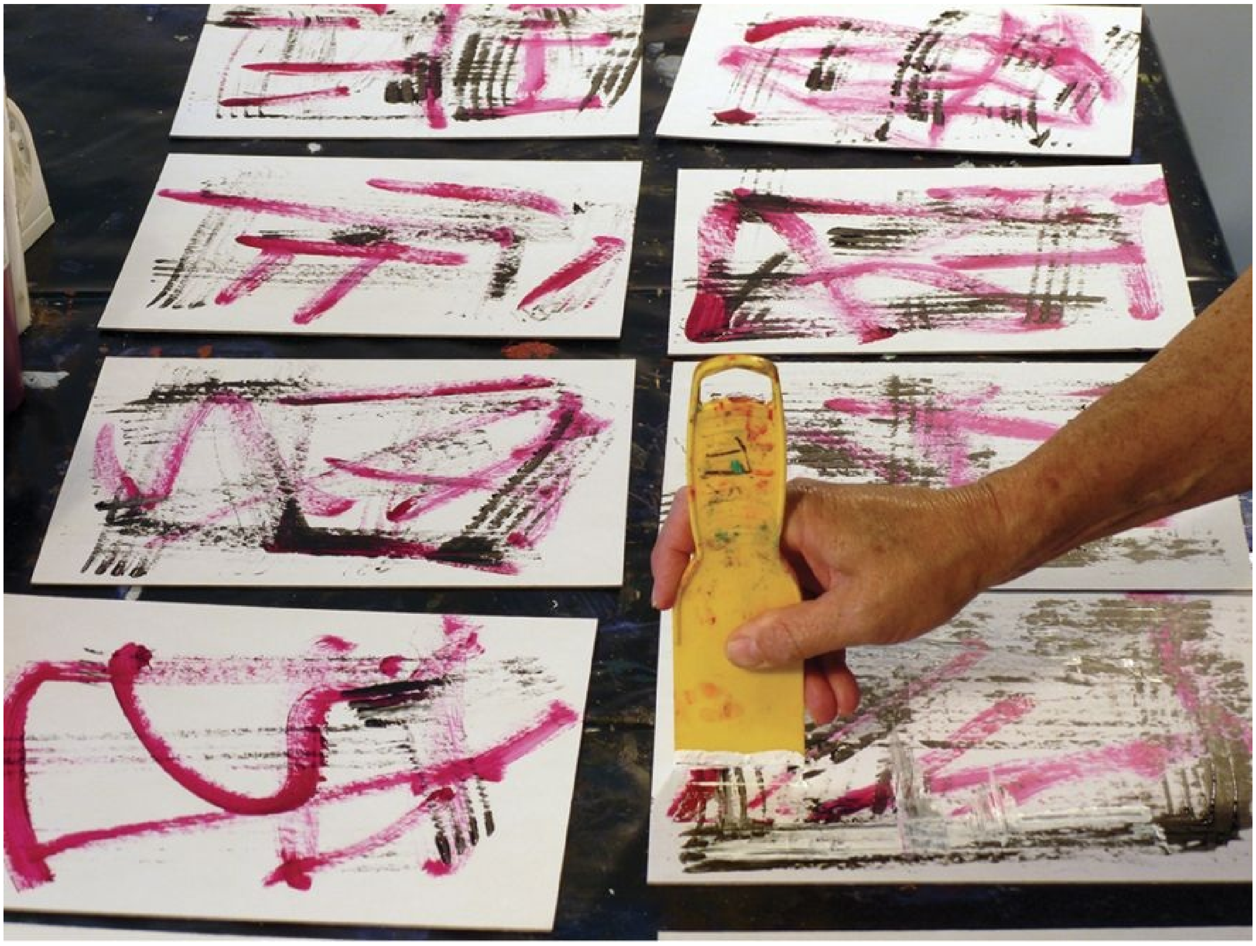
Set up your table with ten substrates. Put out some fluid paint; choose just one color, plus black and white. I used Quinacridone Magenta, Titanium White and Bone Black.



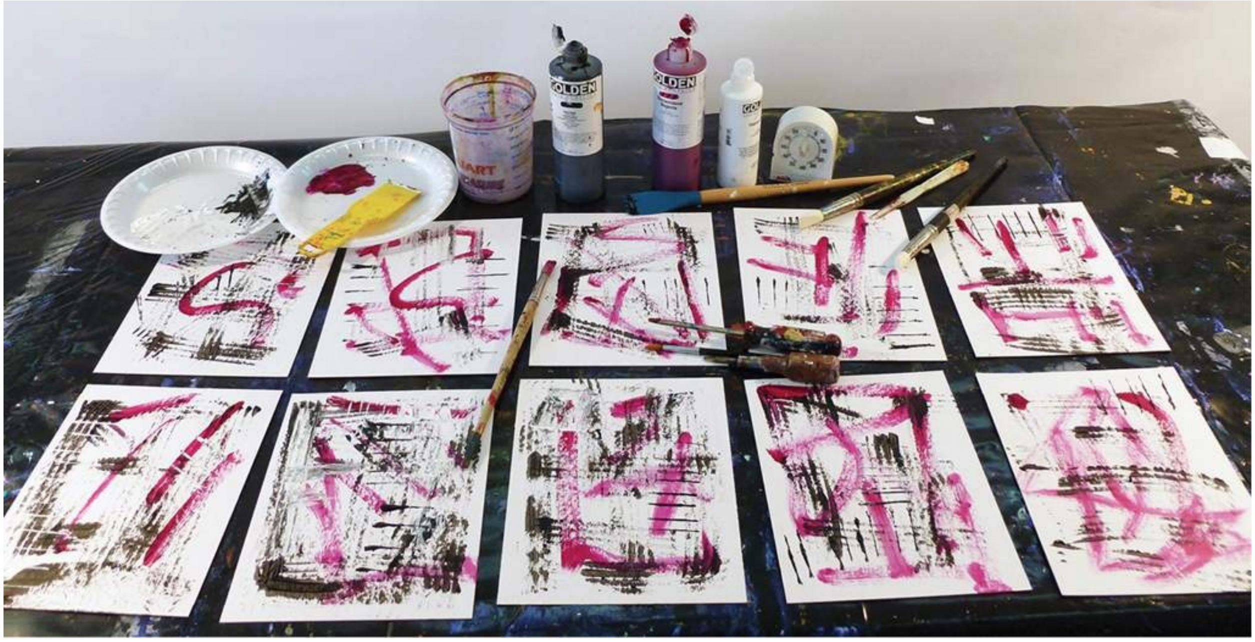
STEP 1 Set out some water and paper towels. Get an egg timer and set it for twenty minutes. The only rule here is that you must paint on every piece of board and you must stop at twenty minutes. Try it first with lines made with a paintbrush.



STEP 2 Get some really interesting line makers and make varying types of lines on all ten pieces of your surface. The lines can intersect but your focus should be on making lines only, not shapes.



STEP 3 Use line makers from the hardware store, kitchen or wherever you can find them. Here I’m using a paint scraper from the hardware store.

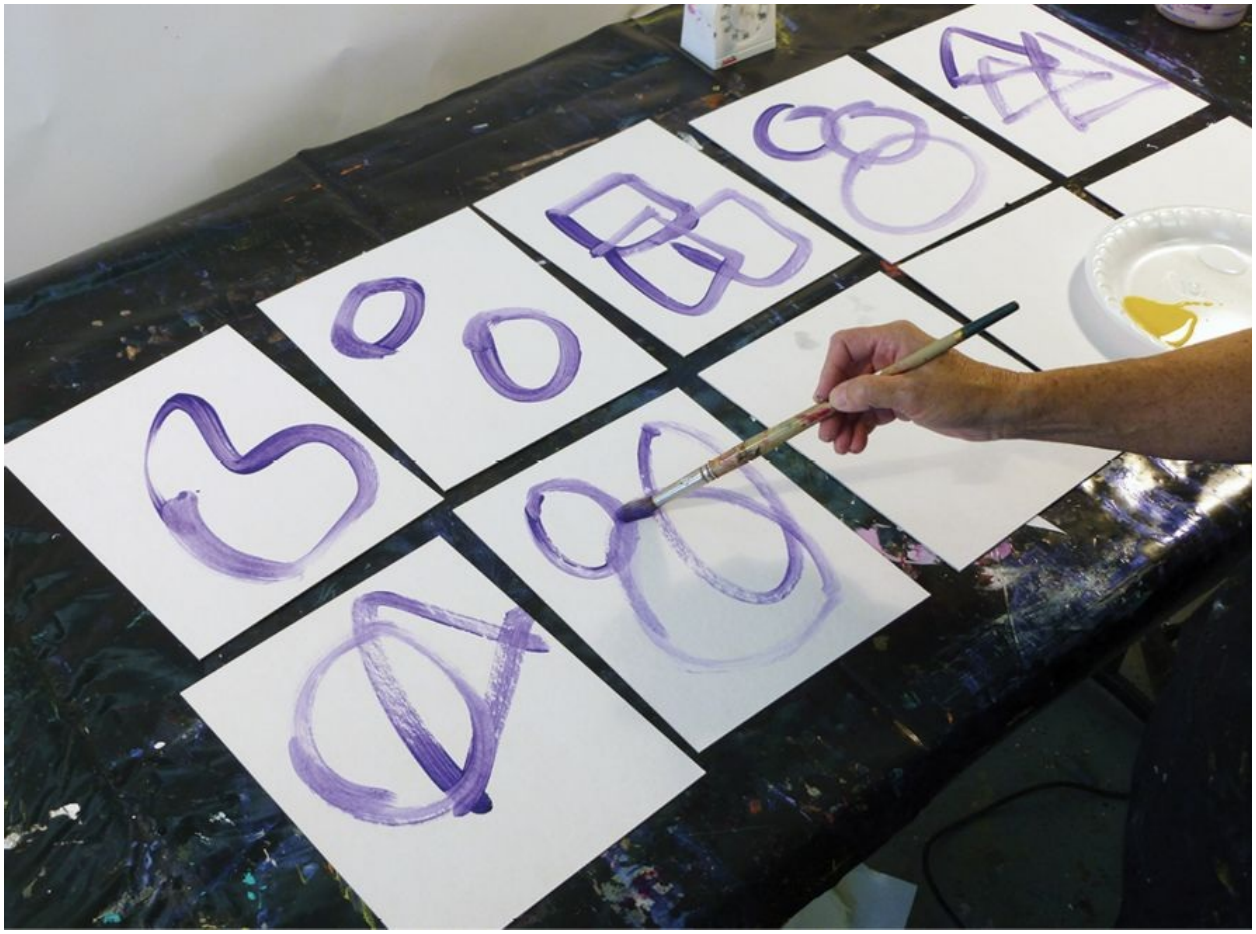


STEP 4 Keep repeating the lines with different types of line makers until you’ve covered all ten pieces in the allotted twenty minutes.

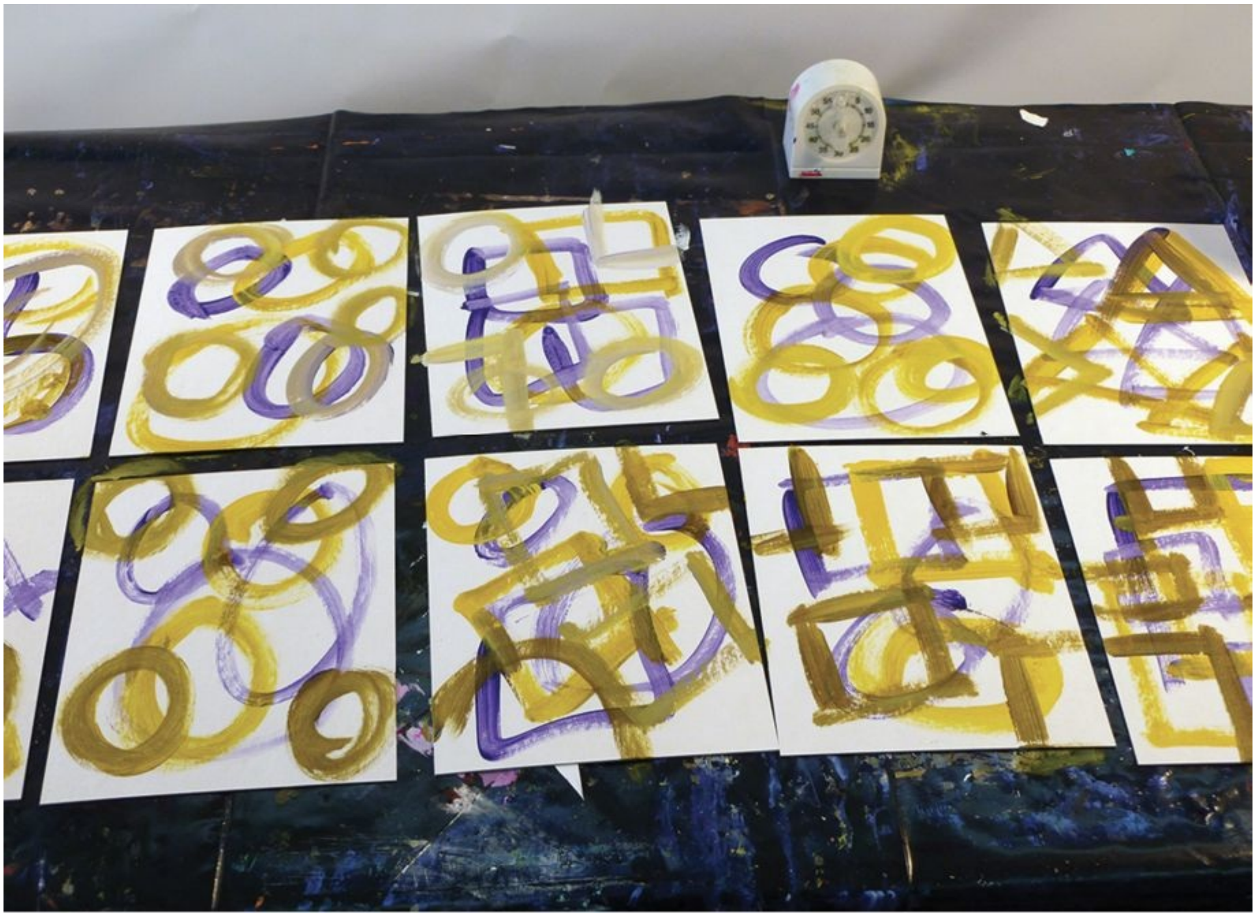
When the egg timer goes off, stop! You’ll be surprised at how much you’ve done. And this is only the beginning. Imagine having only twenty minutes a day for a week. That’s a lot of work getting done!

VERSION TWO: SHAPES ONLY

Keep everything the same as the previous exercise, except use shape instead of line. (See Tools of the Trade for more information on shape and line.)



STEP 1 Again, cover all ten pieces in the allotted twenty minutes and this time use only shapes.

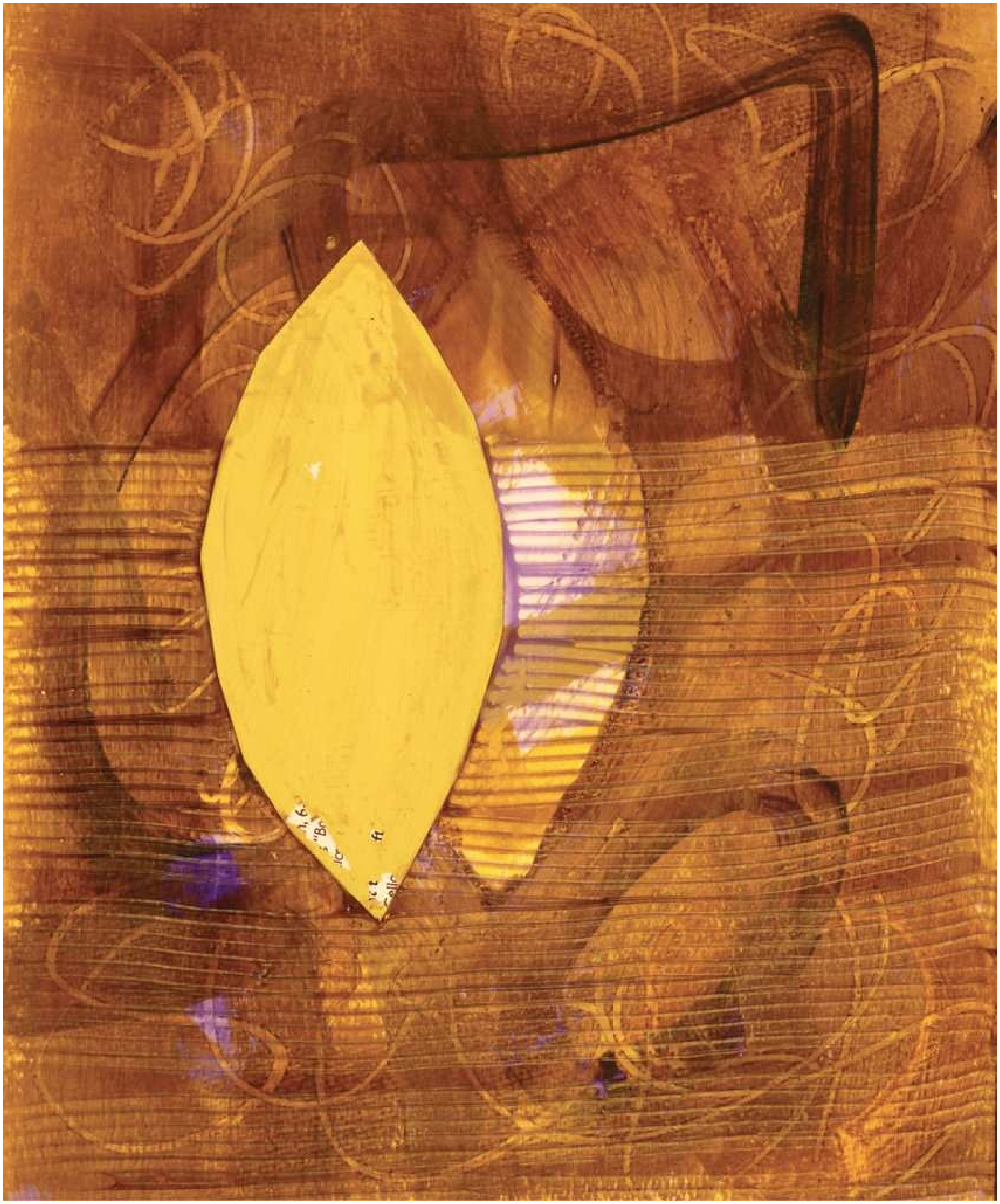


STEP 2 Keep repeating the same shape or different shapes on top of each other until the egg timer goes off.

VERSION THREE: SHAPE AND LINE TOGETHER

It just makes sense that at some point you would want to use both line and shape. And why not? It will flow easily and make for a great composition. But remember, twenty minutes only!

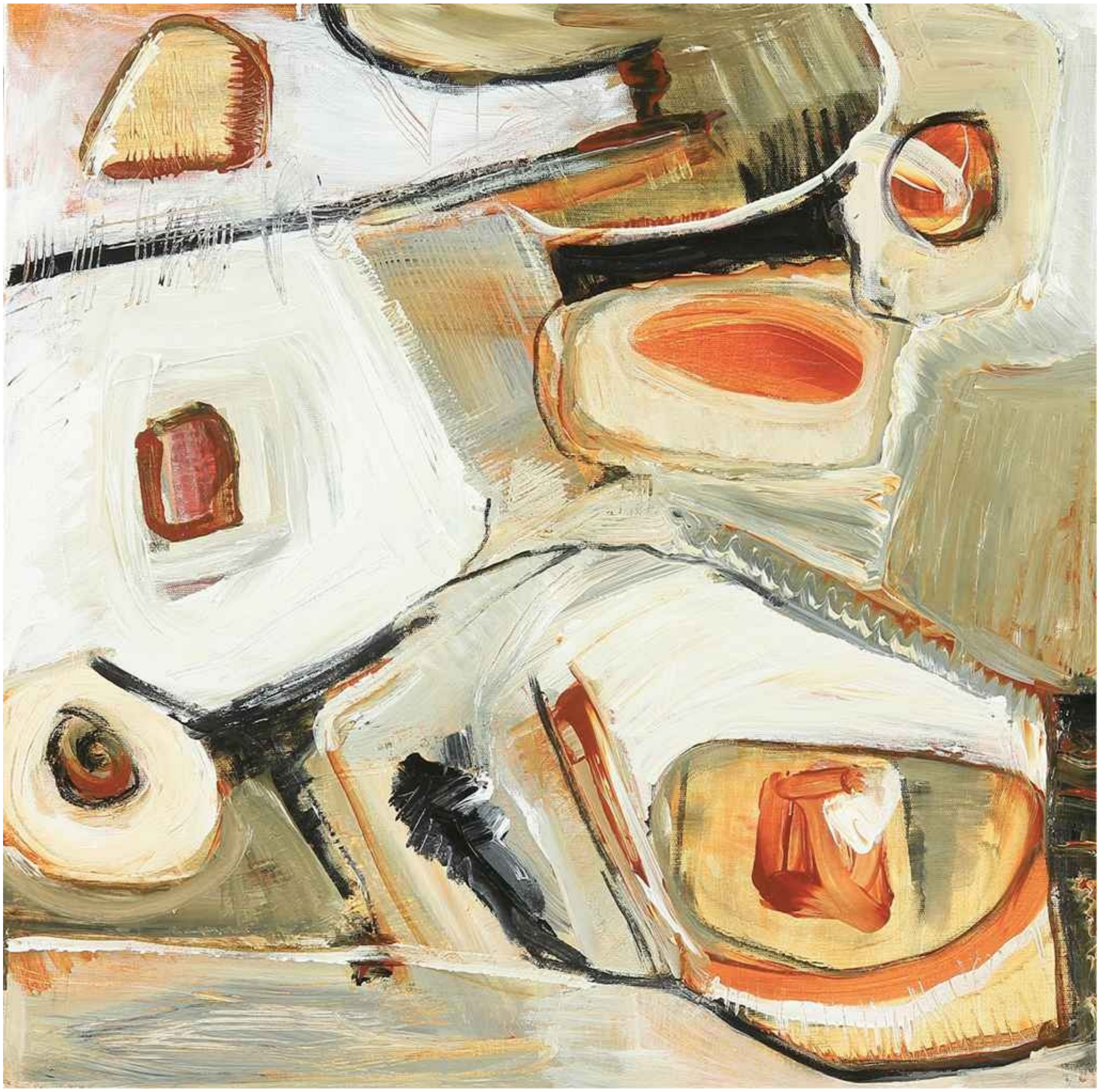
Using my old friend contrast, I spiced up the composition, never straying too far from the main elements I've decided upon—shape and line.



Here's the end result, a small painting I completed based on these speed paintings. I added a bit of collage and a glaze made with soft gel gloss and a bit of Nickel Azo Yellow.

What’s next? Continue at your own pace, working on these ten pieces with collage, more paint, layers of gels or polymer medium.

Use any of the other techniques in this book to work on top of these ten paintings. This technique will get the pump primed. It’s up to you to continue.



Lynn Glenn makes use of repetitive shapes in her abstracts. Notice here how she is making the most of simple organic shapes by repeating them and varying the sizes.

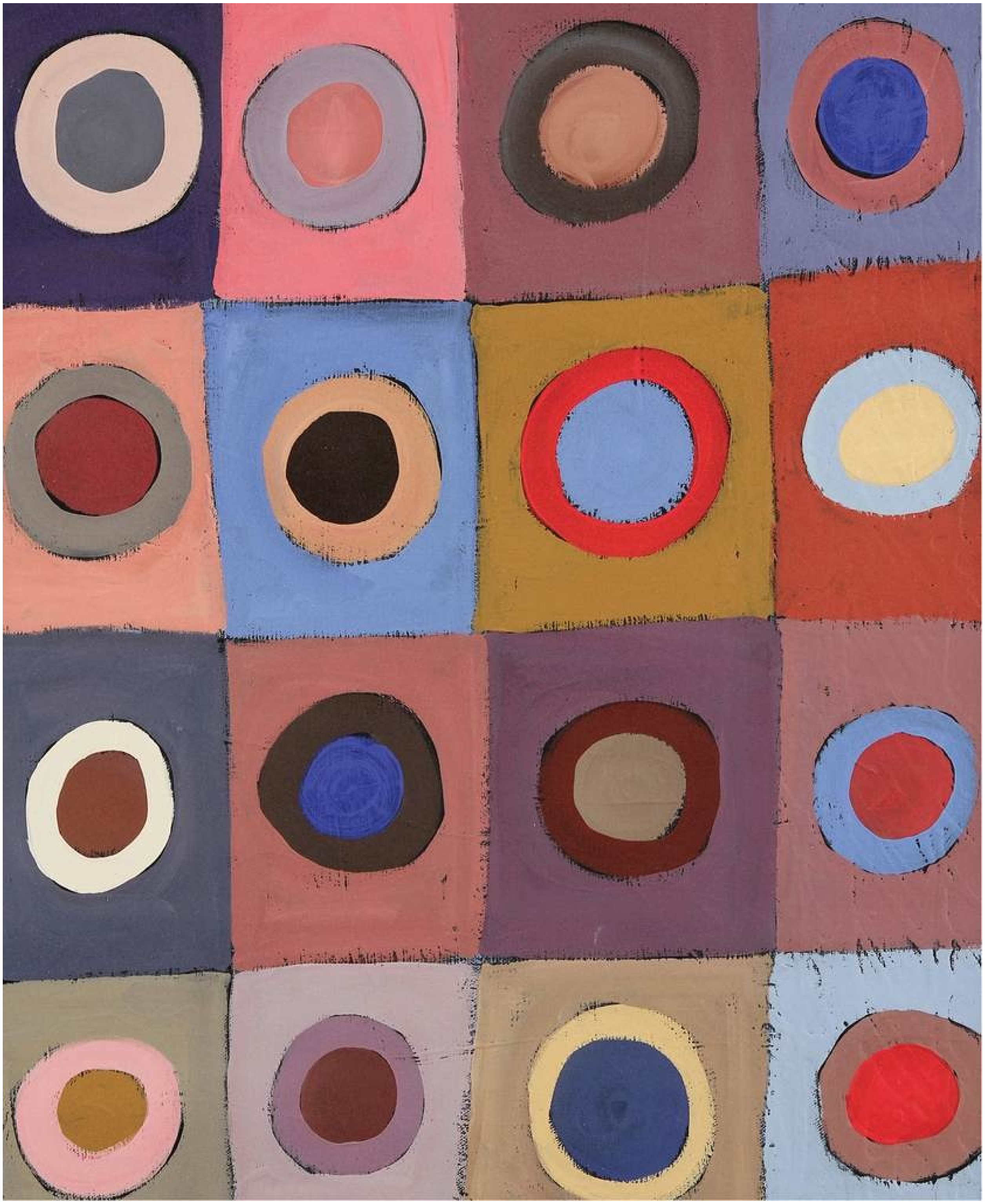
STONES
Lynn Glenn
Acrylic on caanvas
24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)
Collection of the artist

EXPLORATION THREE

Embracing Basic Forms

For humans it’s a challenge to look at images and not label them with definitions or descriptions as in, that cloud looks like a dinosaur. After all, that ability is what keeps us from driving off cliffs or running stop signs because we recognize shapes and know what they mean. This can be a problem, though, when you are trying to create interesting abstract paintings. In this technique you will get the tools to create abstract compositions from a more figurative beginning. And what could be harder than abstracting the human form? This makes it easy and fun!

“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.” — Vincent van Gogh



ROUNDABOUT I

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm)

Creating Abstractly With Basic Shapes

They may not look like much on their own, but you can do a lot when you combine the simple circle, triangle and square … and boy can they get complicated! Take a few circles and squares, throw in a triangle or two and build yourself a nifty composition based on an imaginary figure.

What You Need

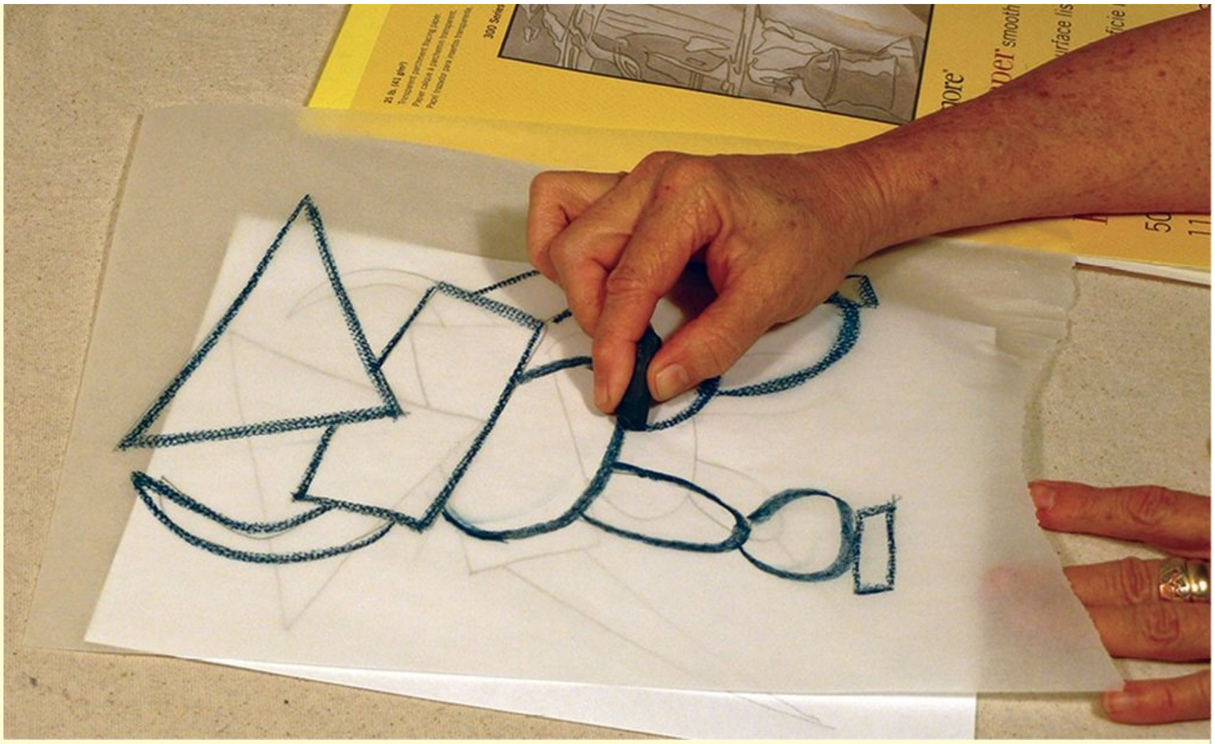
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 30–60 minutes assorted brushes
canvas or board, 9" × 12"–18" × 24" (23cm × 30cm–46cm × 61cm) Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Pyrrole Red
- Carbon Black
- Naples Yellow

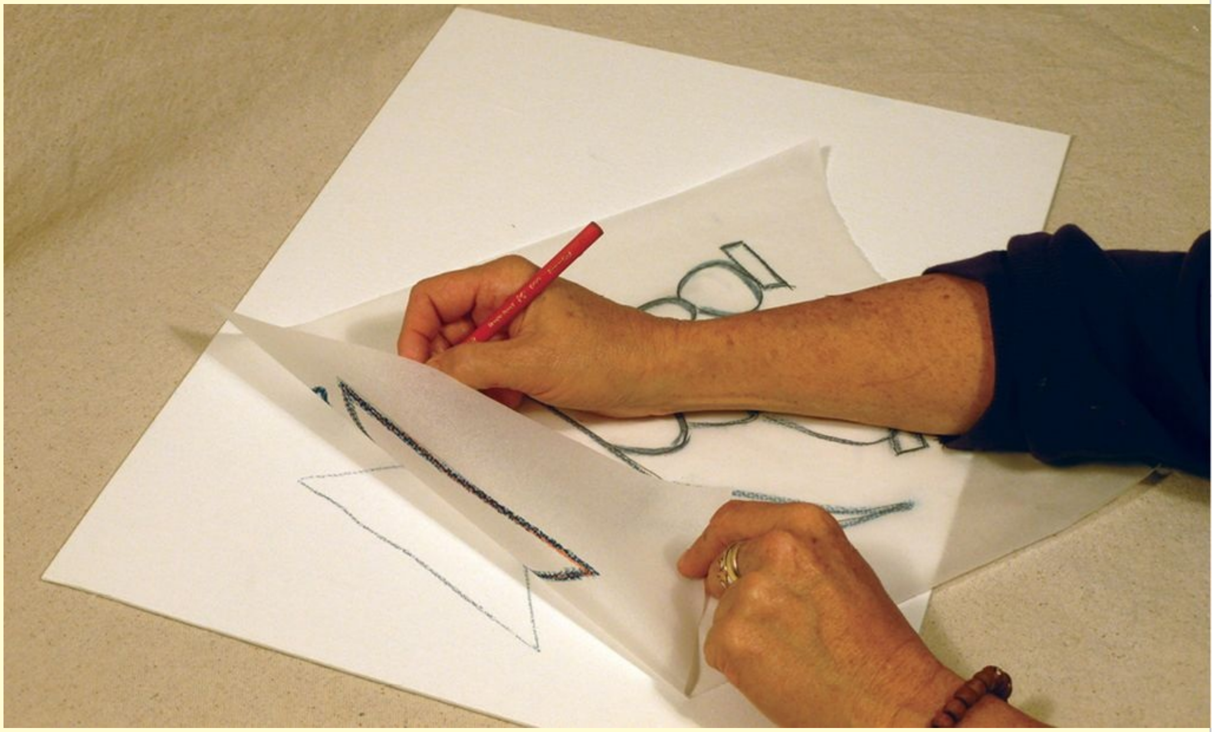
sketch paper, white 9" × 12" (23cm × 30cm) no. 2 pencil
colored pencil, red
tracing paper 9" × 12" (23cm × 30cm) soft pastel, black or dark blue palette
water container
paper towels

Make Simple Carbon Paper With Pastel

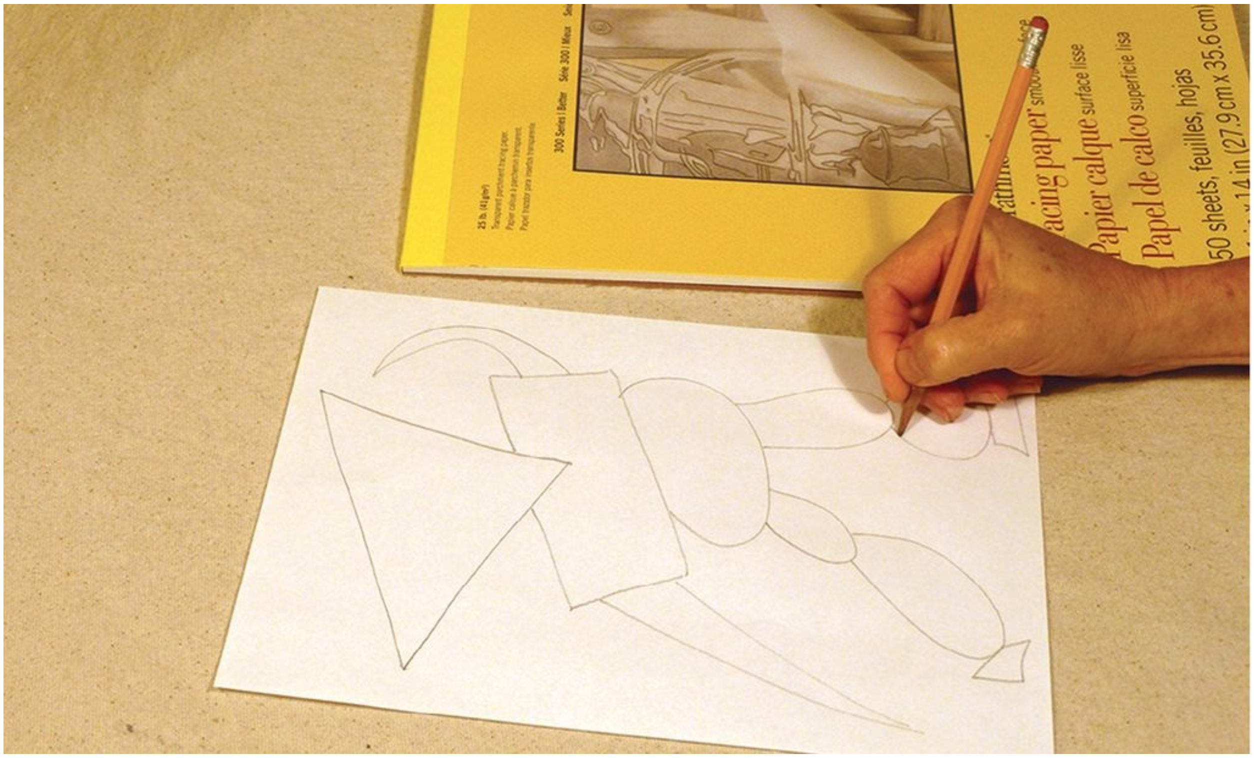
For those times you don’t have actual carbon paper lying around, the process of improvising by making your own version is easy.



STEP 1 Begin with the image you wish to transfer on a piece of tracing paper. Turn the tracing paper over and with a soft black or dark blue pastel, retrace over the backs of the pencil lines.

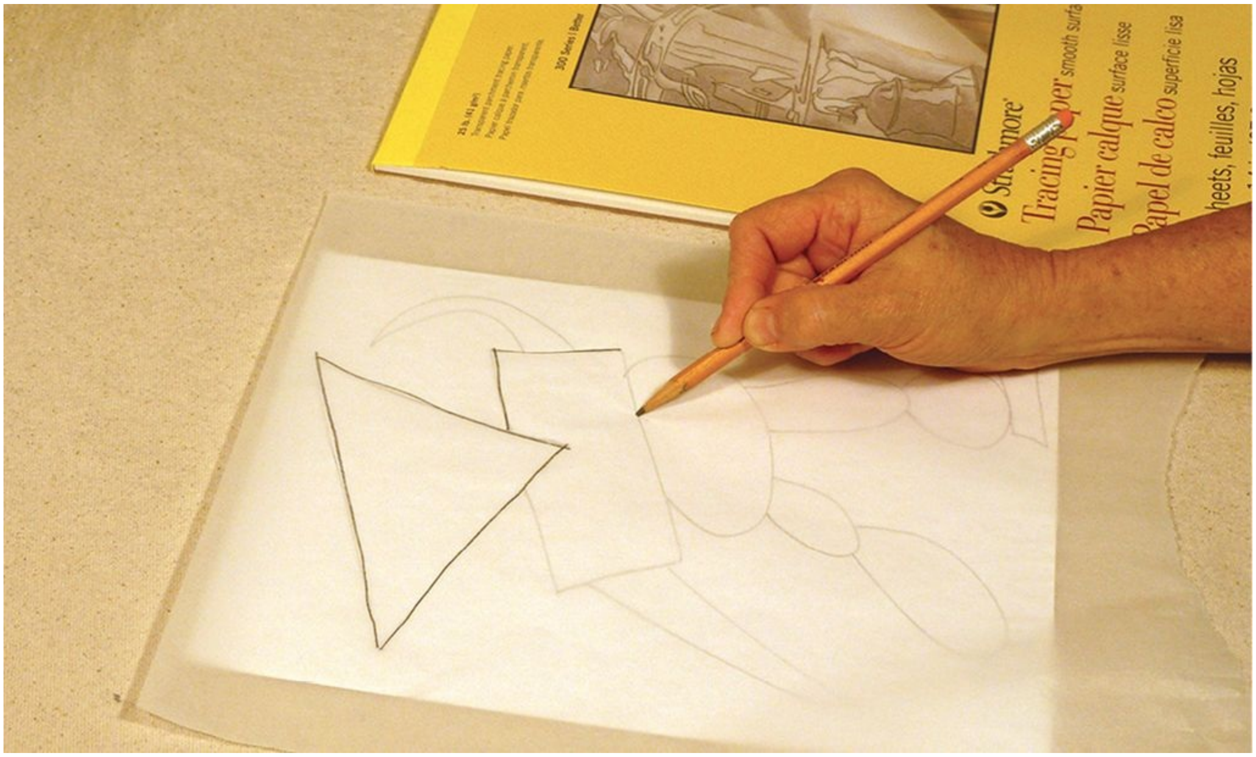


STEP 2 Lay the tracing paper, pastel side down, onto your surface. Trace the image with a red colored pencil (colored so you can see where you are tracing). The black pastel will leave a nice outline on your chosen surface.

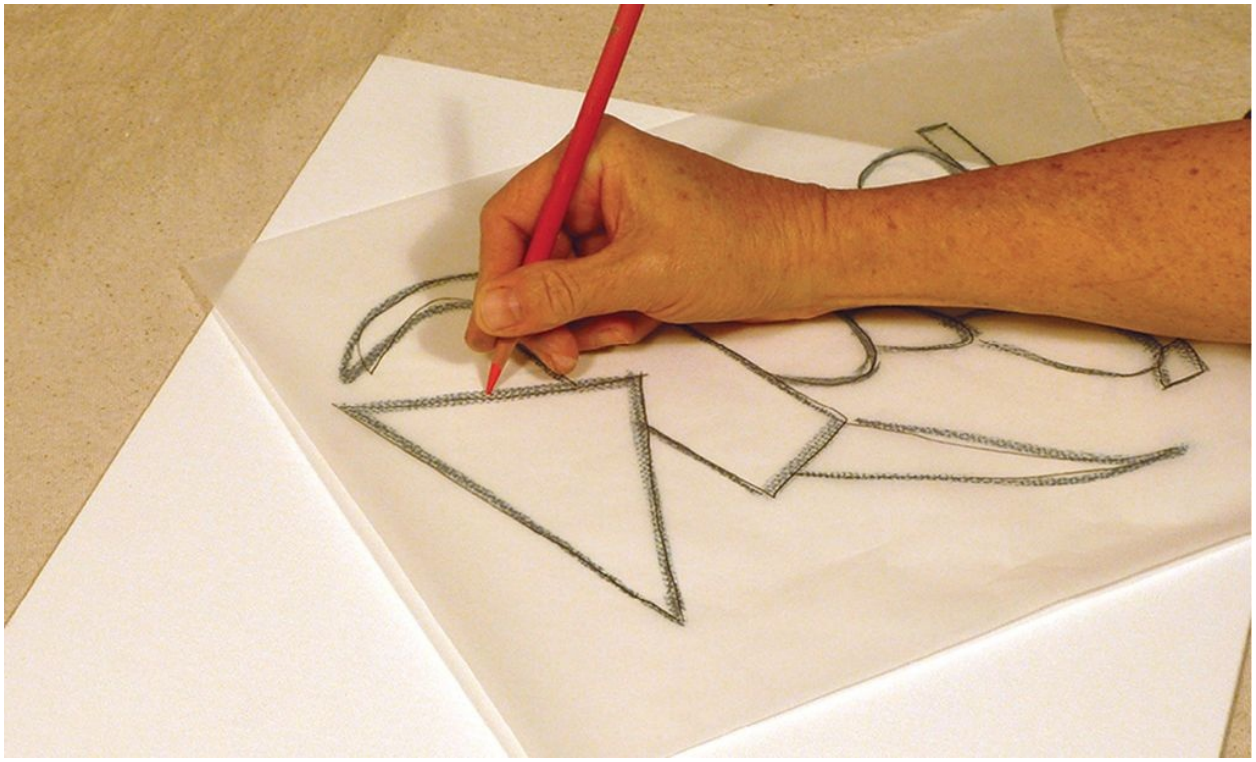


300 Series | Better Série 300 | Mieux
racing paper smooth surface
Papier calque surface lisse
Papel de calco superficie lisa
50 sheets, feuilles, hojas

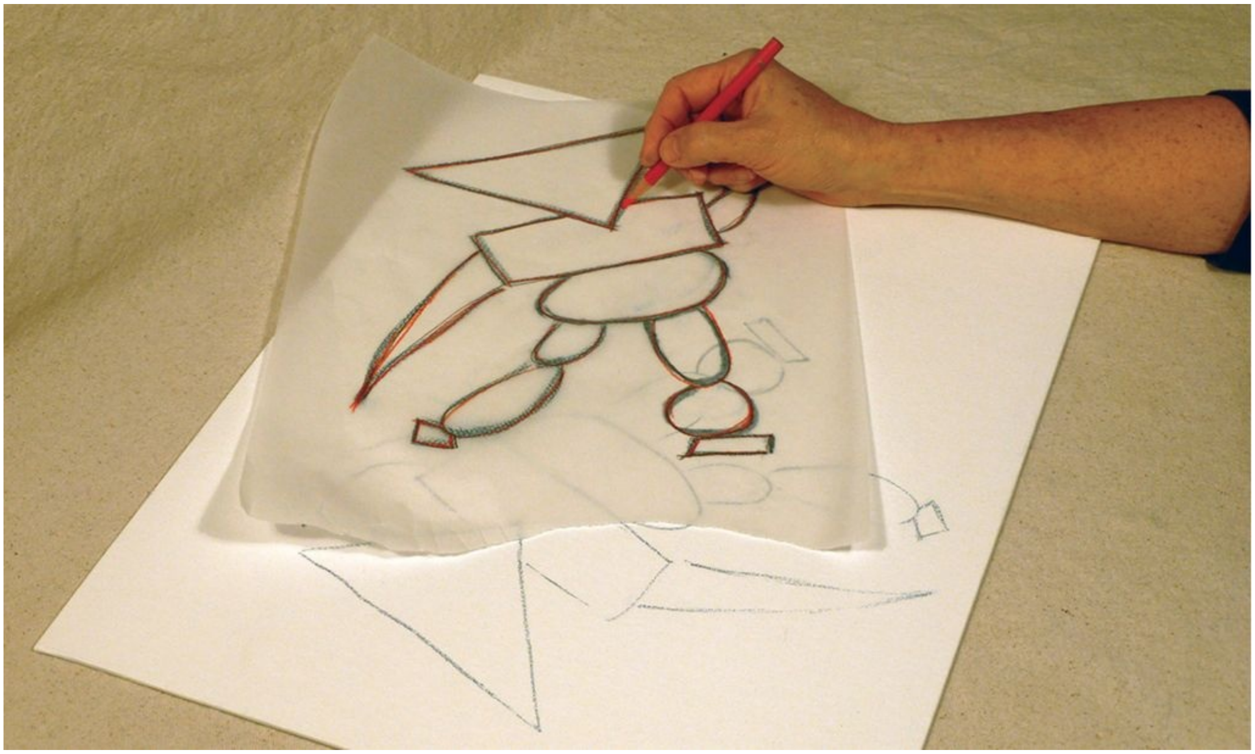
STEP 1 Start with the three basic shapes: a circle, a square and a triangle. Using these in any combination you like, draw a figure. Your figure will need a head, a torso and arms and legs. Use only the three basic shapes to do this. You can repeat them and change their proportions. You can give your creature a hat, clothing and accessories if you like. (This is a lot of fun to do with kids!)


Papier calque surface lisse
Papel de calco superficie lisa

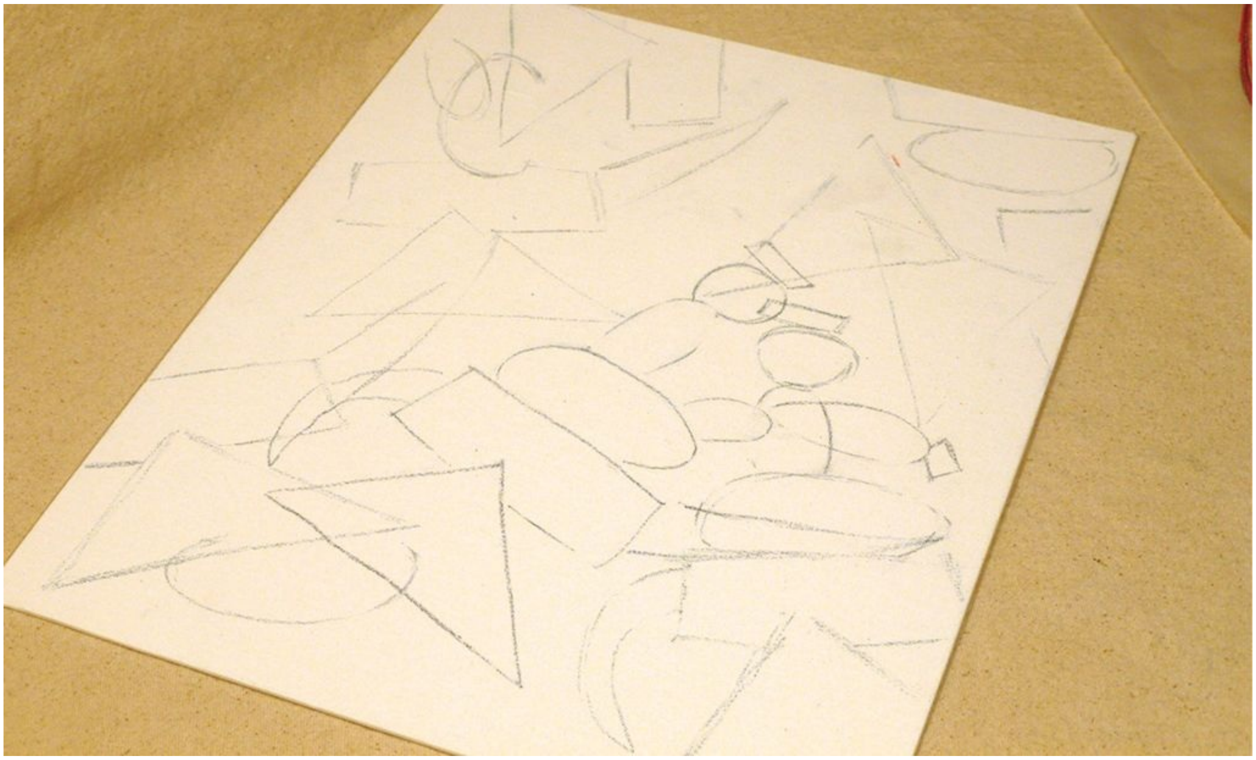
STEP 2 Copy this drawing onto tracing paper.



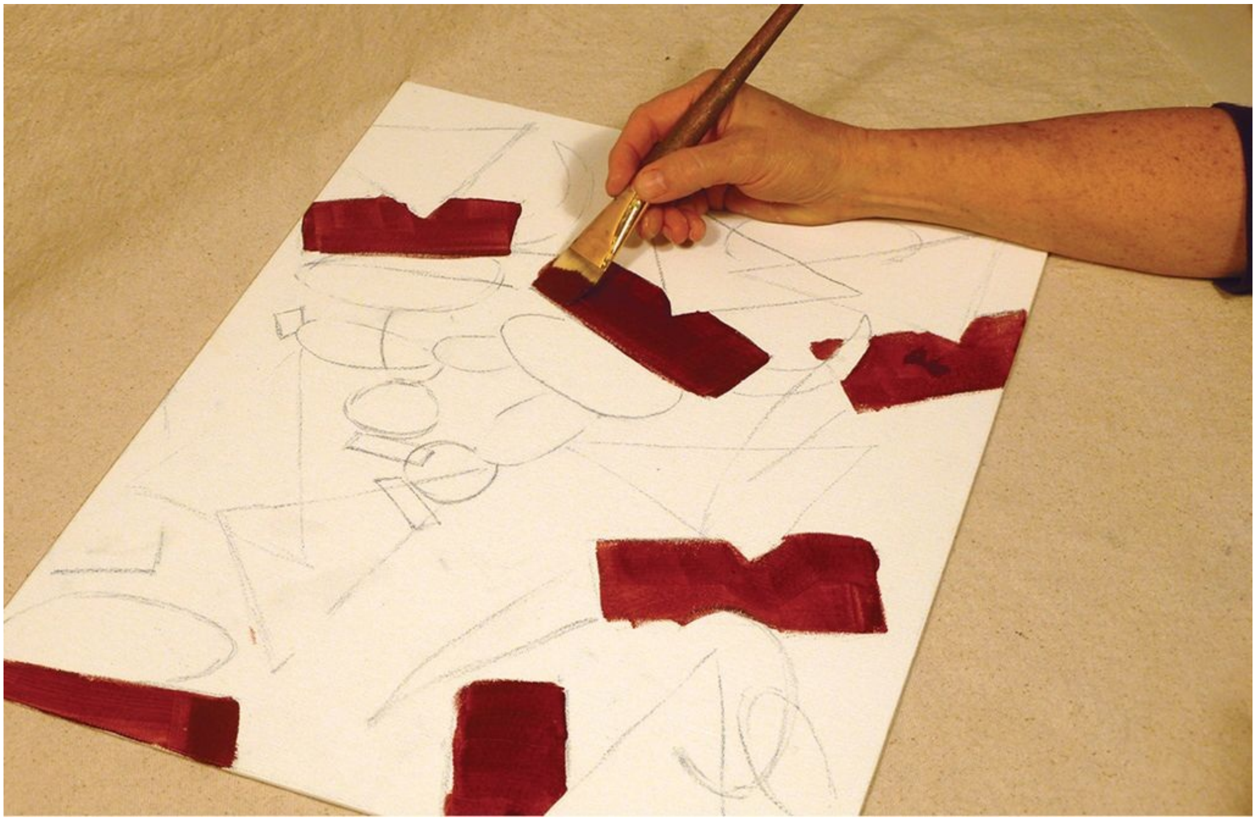
STEP 3 Now copy this to your canvas or board one time using simple carbon paper made from pastel.



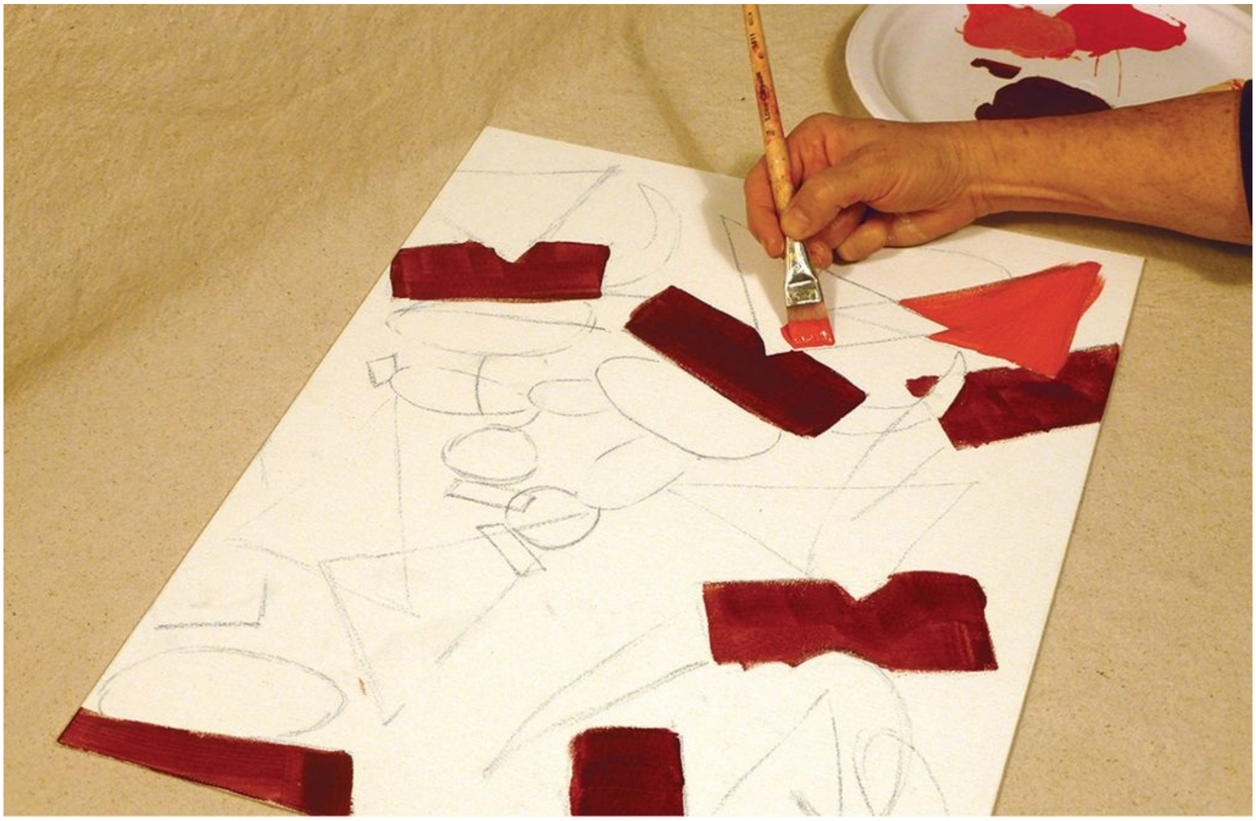
STEP 4 Rotate the drawing 90 degrees to the left and copy it again.



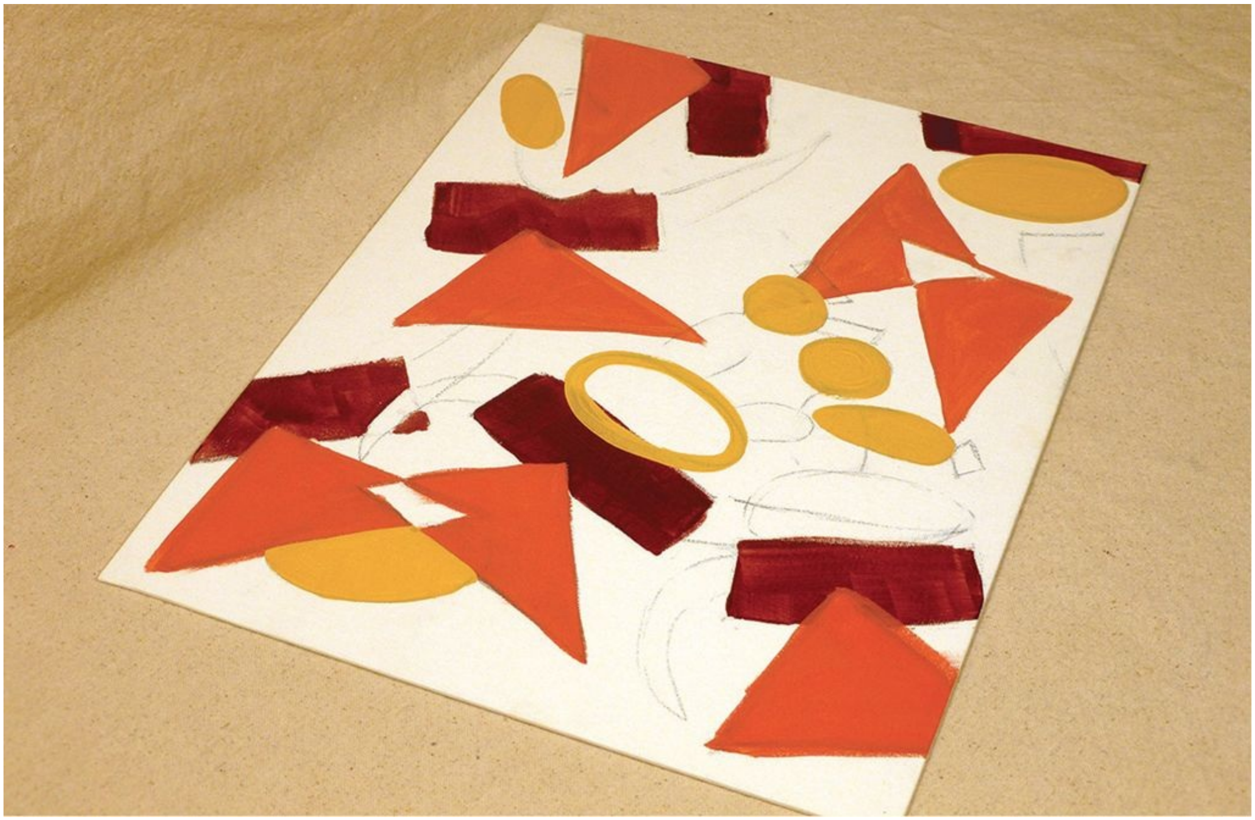
STEP 5 Keep rotating and moving your drawing until you have covered the canvas. By now the drawing on your canvas or board should bear no resemblance to the beastie you started with.



STEP 6 Mix a tiny bit of Carbon Black with Pyrrole Red to make a warm brown. Fill in about one-third of the shapes with this color. Use rhythm and repetition to create a strong composition.

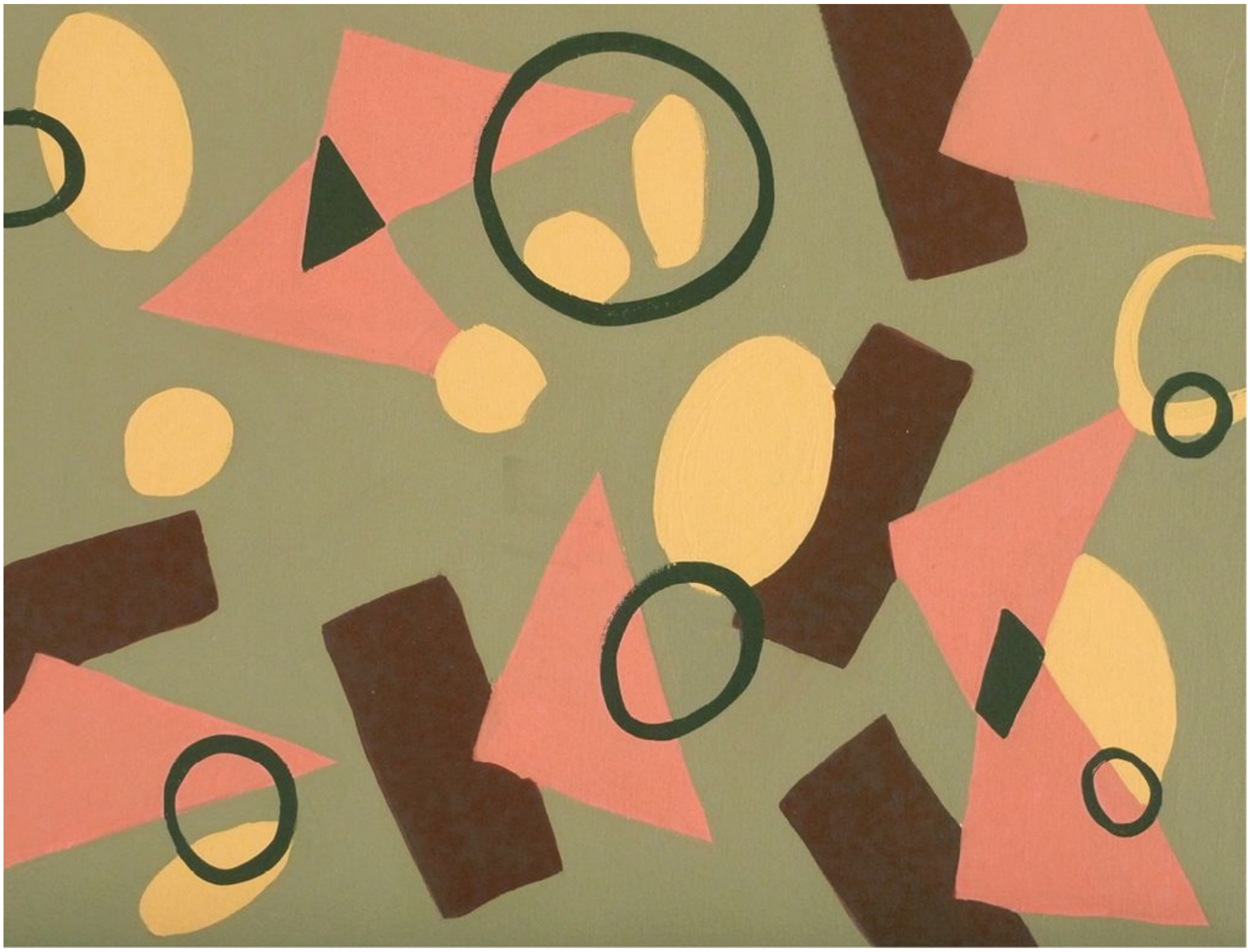


STEP 7 Mix about ½ teaspoon of Pyrrole Red with about 2 tablespoons of Naples Yellow to make a warm orange. Fill in another one-third of the shapes with this color.



STEP 8 You may choose to edit out shapes or create new shapes as you go. Finally paint in the remaining shapes with Naples Yellow.

STEP 9 Mix about ½ teaspoon of Carbon Black with about 2 tablespoons of Naples Yellow to make a gray-green, which you can then use to paint in the background as you’ll see in the finished version next.

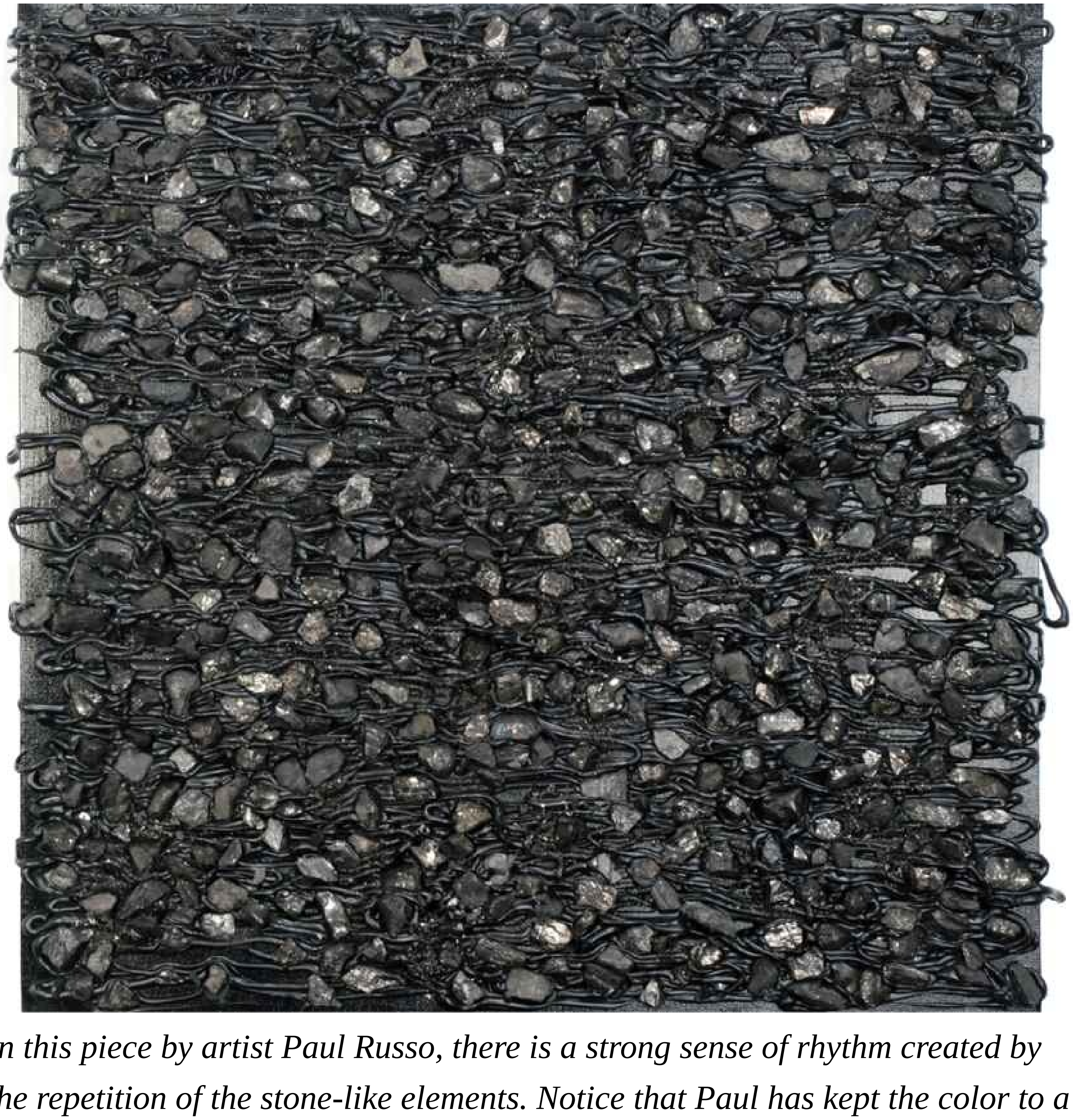


Finished

Here's the finished piece. I have added Carbon Black circles and deleted some of the shapes that I didn't think were necessary to the finished composition. It bears no resemblance at all to the creature that I started with. The lesson here is to use the raw material to get started and then bring your intuition into play, adding shapes, deleting shapes and colors and so forth. Where this leads is up to you!

Creating a Strong Composition Using Rhythm and Repetition

Repeated design elements or motifs can be used to create rhythm in a painting. Rhythm can be used to create strong and interesting compositions as you can see from the art that follows.



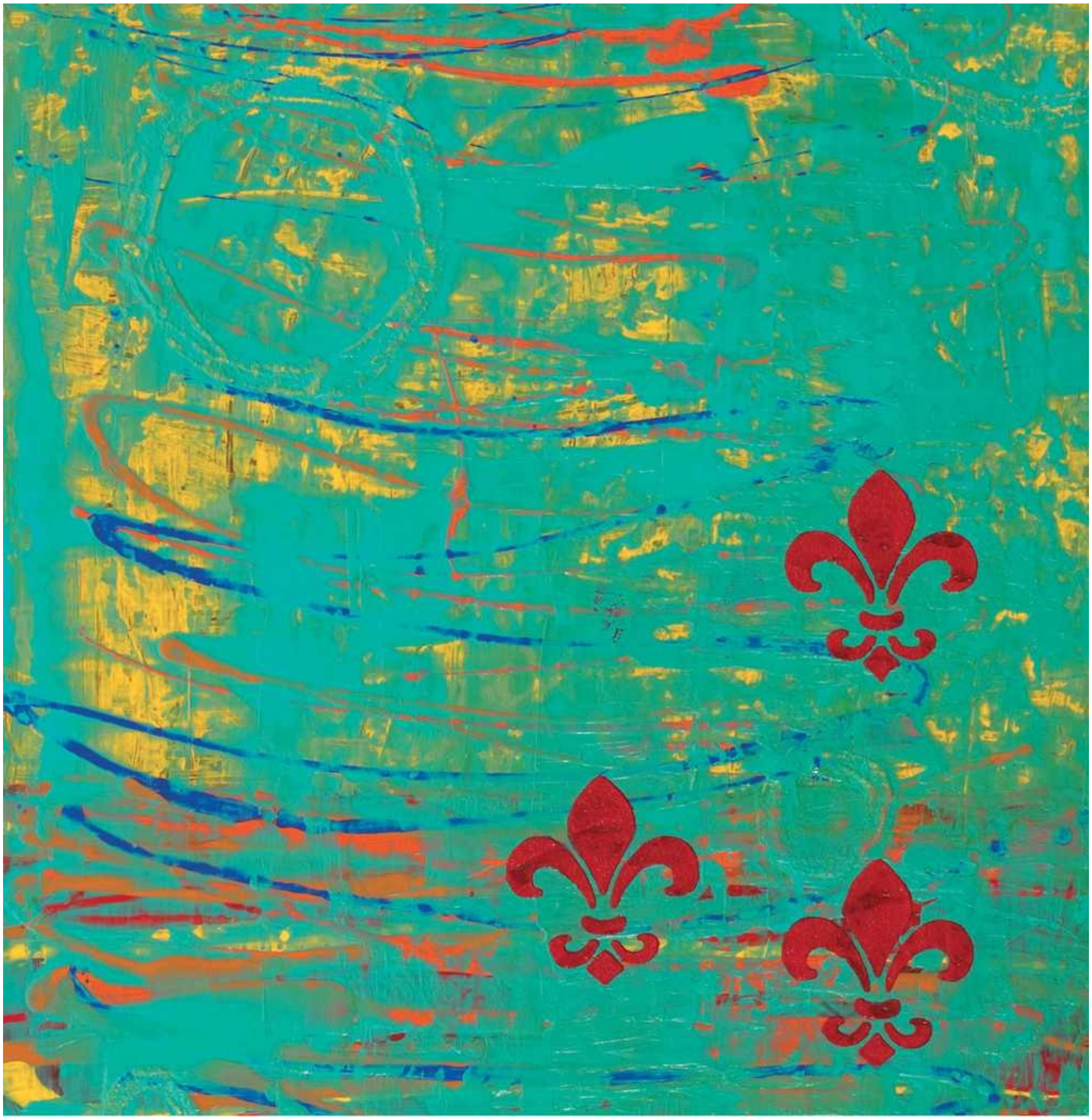
In this piece by artist Paul Russo, there is a strong sense of rhythm created by the repetition of the stone-like elements. Notice that Paul has kept the color to a minimum, thereby inviting us to notice the texture and repeating forms.

HECTOR

Paul Russo Latex, caulk and coal on painted canvas 24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)

Using Contrast to Create Interest

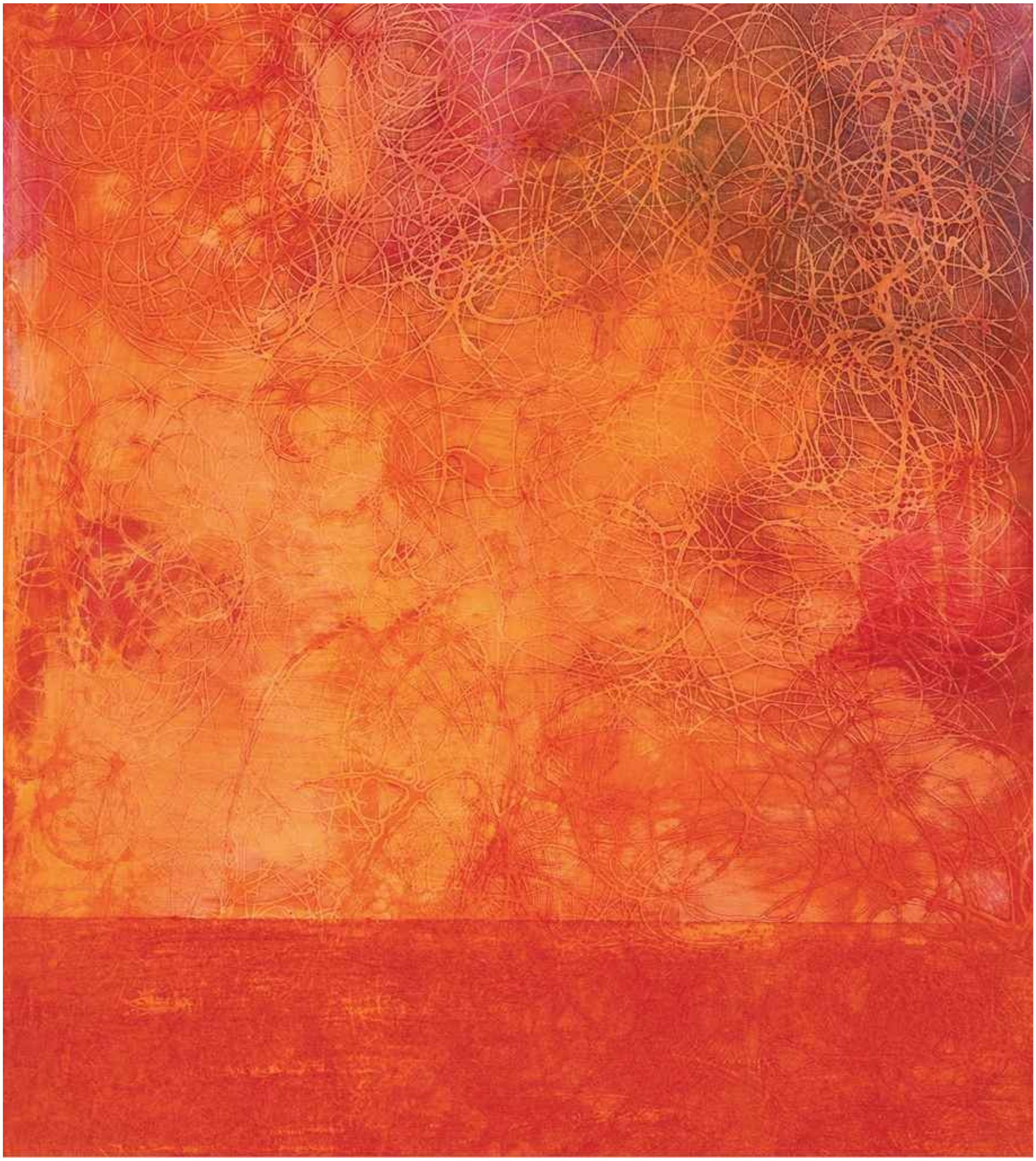
You can also create interest by using color to create contrast.



In this piece I used color as the main design element. By using Naphthol Red Medium in the fleur-de-lis shapes in contrast to the Cobalt Teal background, I created a strong focal point.

ITALIA IX

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 24" × 30" (61cm × 76cm)



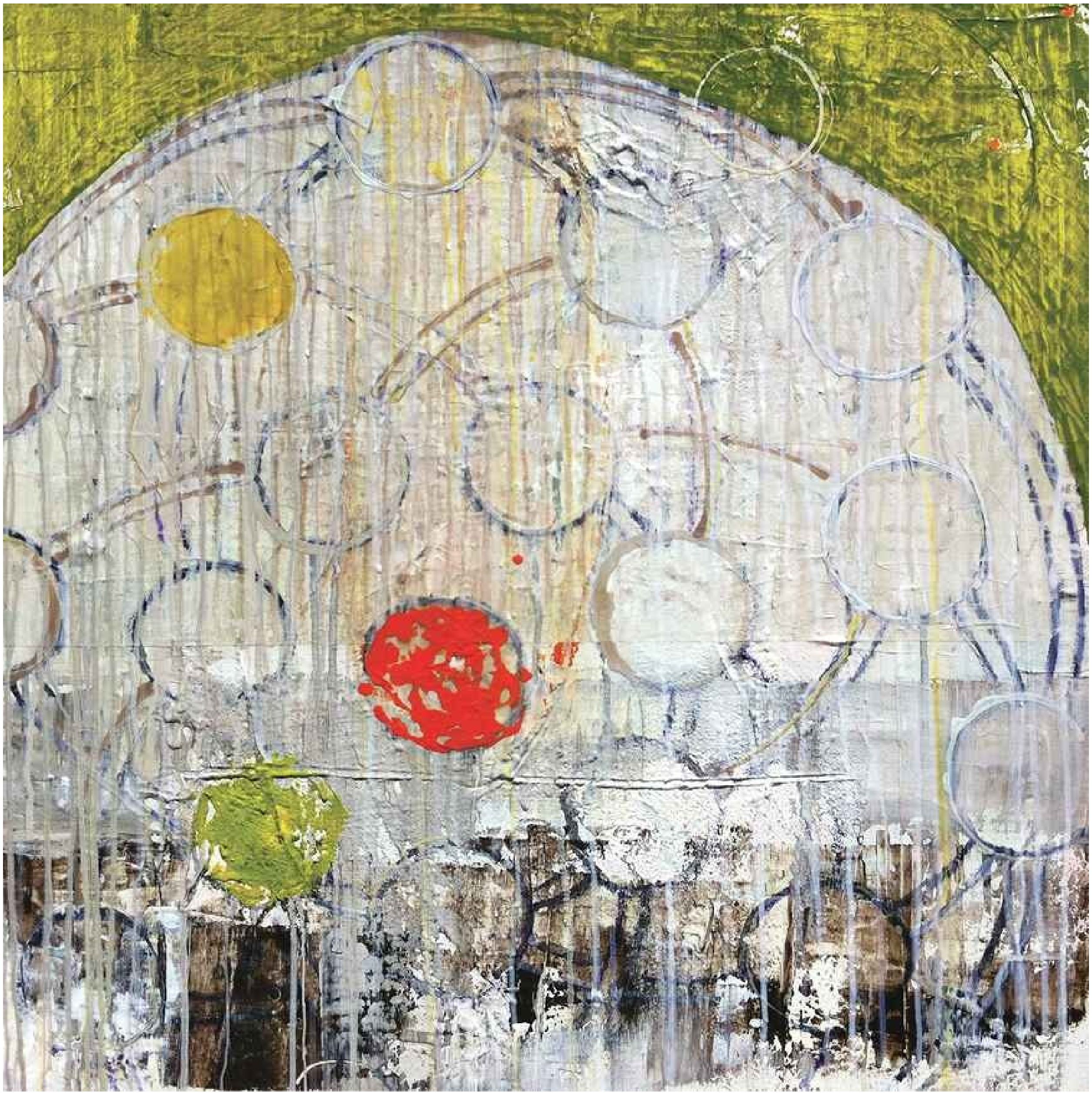
In this painting I've contrasted two design elements: color and texture. Keeping it simple, I laid down a texture by dripping Clear Tar Gel onto a blank canvas. I then painted several thin layers of color. Finally, I put on a large band of Glass Bead Gel, tinted with just a hint of Transparent Pyrrole Orange. This pebble-like texture stands in contrast to the smooth fluid line created by the Clear Tar Gel.

ITALIA XIV

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 36" × 48" (91cm × 122cm)

Keep It Simple!

Use one or two design elements and contrast to create interest. See Rules of the Road for a list of the six principles of design.



In this piece, Tina Pressler uses scale and contrast very effectively. She contrasts the very large circular shape with the repeated smaller circular shapes. The large shape creates drama while the smaller shapes create rhythm and harmony. One shape and some color is all that is really at work here, but look at what Tina does with just a couple of design elements.

THETA

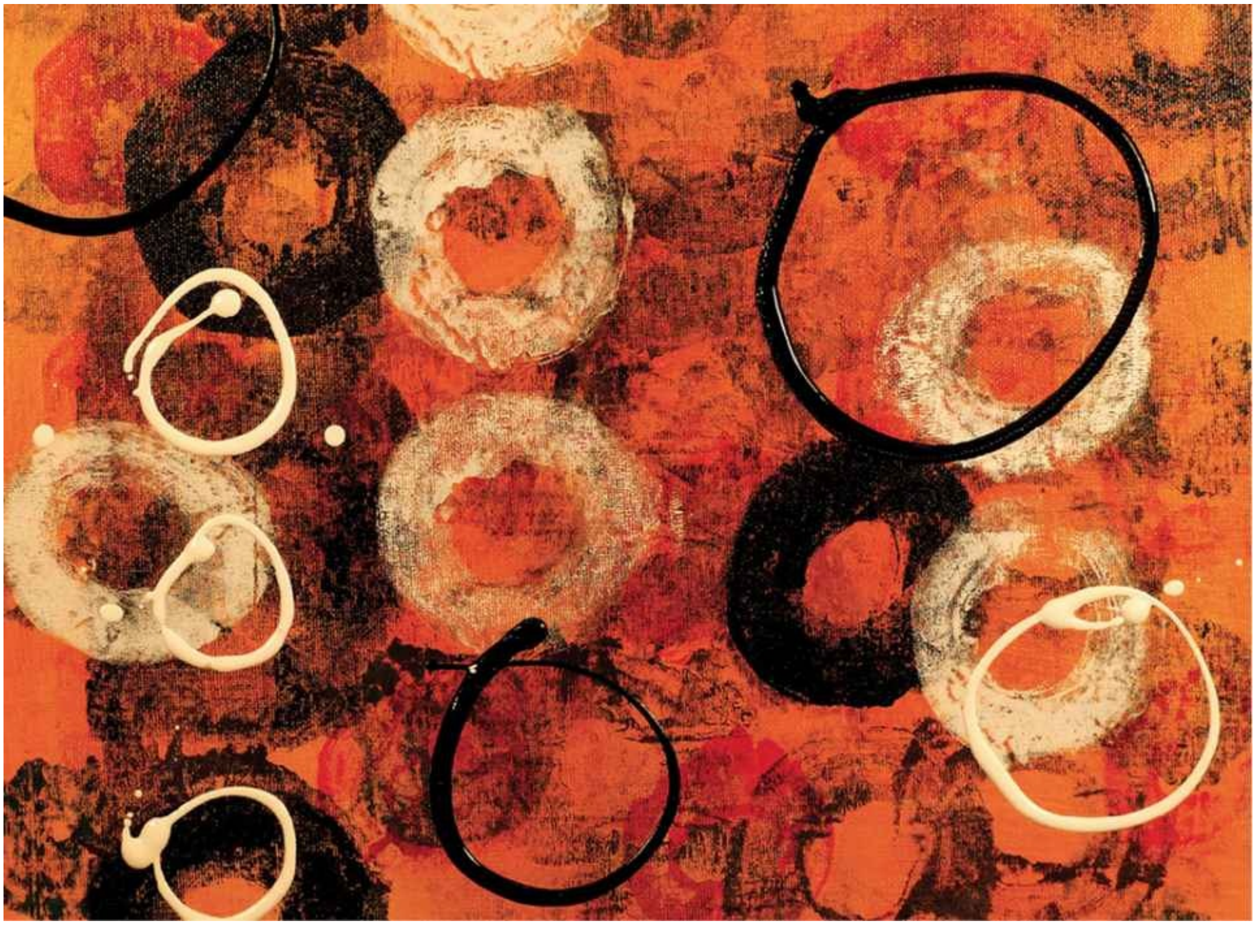
Tina Pressler Acrylic on canvas 30" × 30" (76cm × 76cm)

EXPLORATION FOUR

Printing and Painting

One thing that can keep artists from working is the idea that we might make a mistake. I say embrace your mistakes and use them! This technique is great for celebrating your mistakes. By repeating these shapes and using the mistakes that get made, such as smeared paint, imperfect impressions, smudges and so on, we create a rich and varied background for our painting.

“Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” —Leonardo da Vinci



CIRCULAR AGAIN

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on painted canvas 24" × 18" (61cm × 46cm)

Simple Printing

By painting on plastic drop cloth material and then printing it to canvas or paper, we have very little control over the happy accidents that result. The great thing about this is you can start and stop anytime and anywhere on the canvas. And you can work as big or as small as you like.

What You Need

Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes assorted paintbrushes
canvas, paper or board, any size clear, heavy-duty plastic drop cloth scissors
Golden Fluid Acrylic Paints

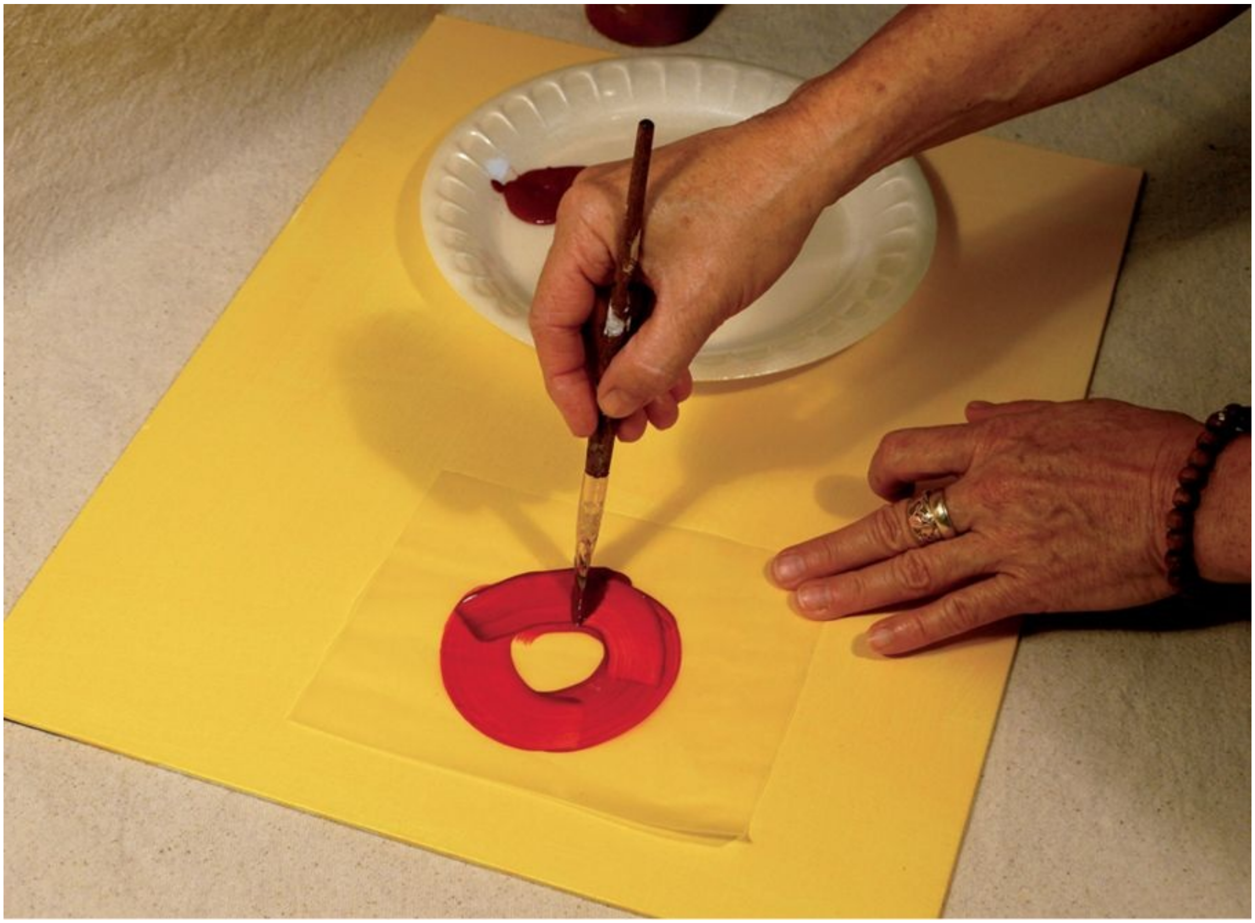
- Hansa Yellow Medium
- Carbon Black
- Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold
- Titanium White

soft rubber brayer

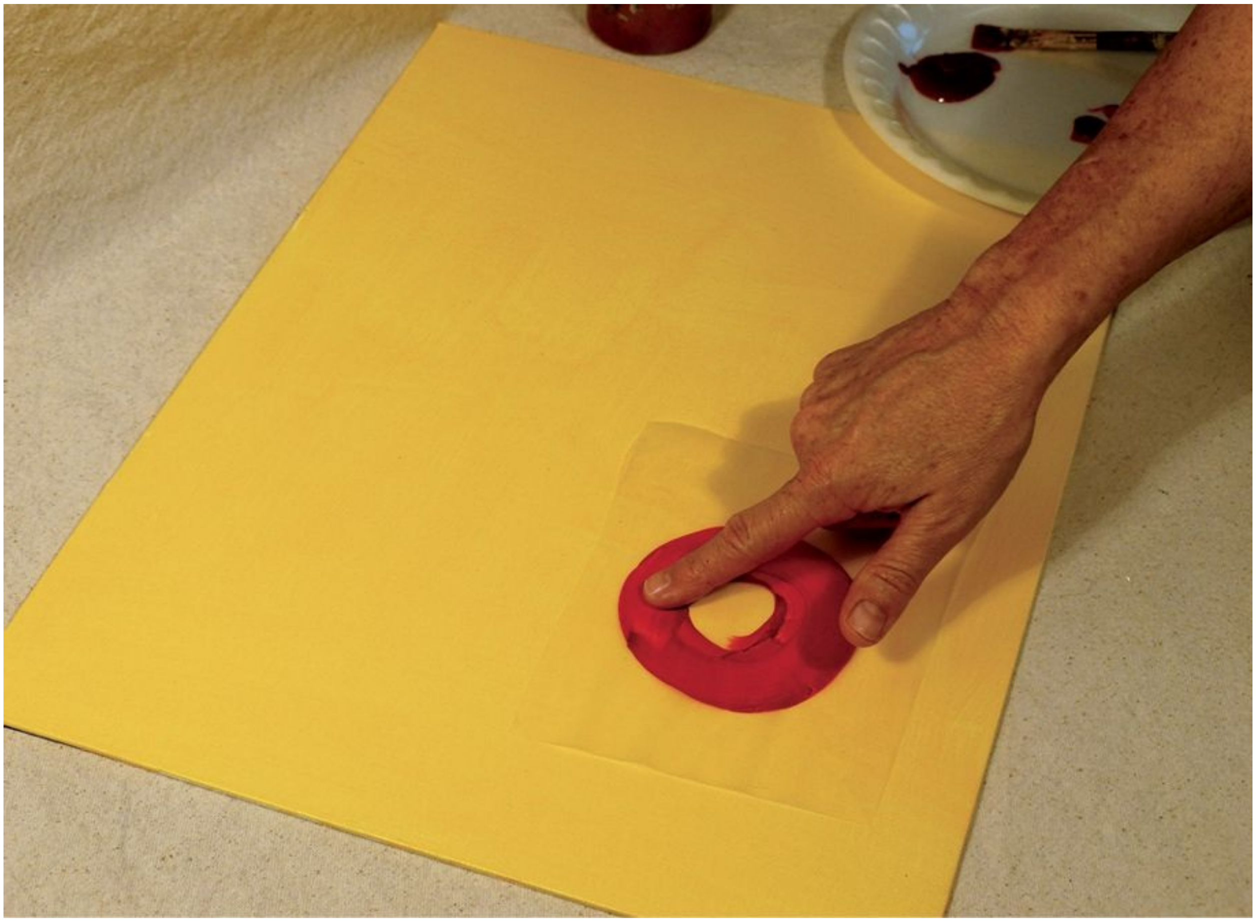
STEP 1 Paint the surface with a layer of Hansa Yellow Medium.

STEP 2 Cut out a rectangle from the clear drop cloth that is roughly one-sixth the size of your paper or canvas. (If your canvas is 16" × 20" (41cm

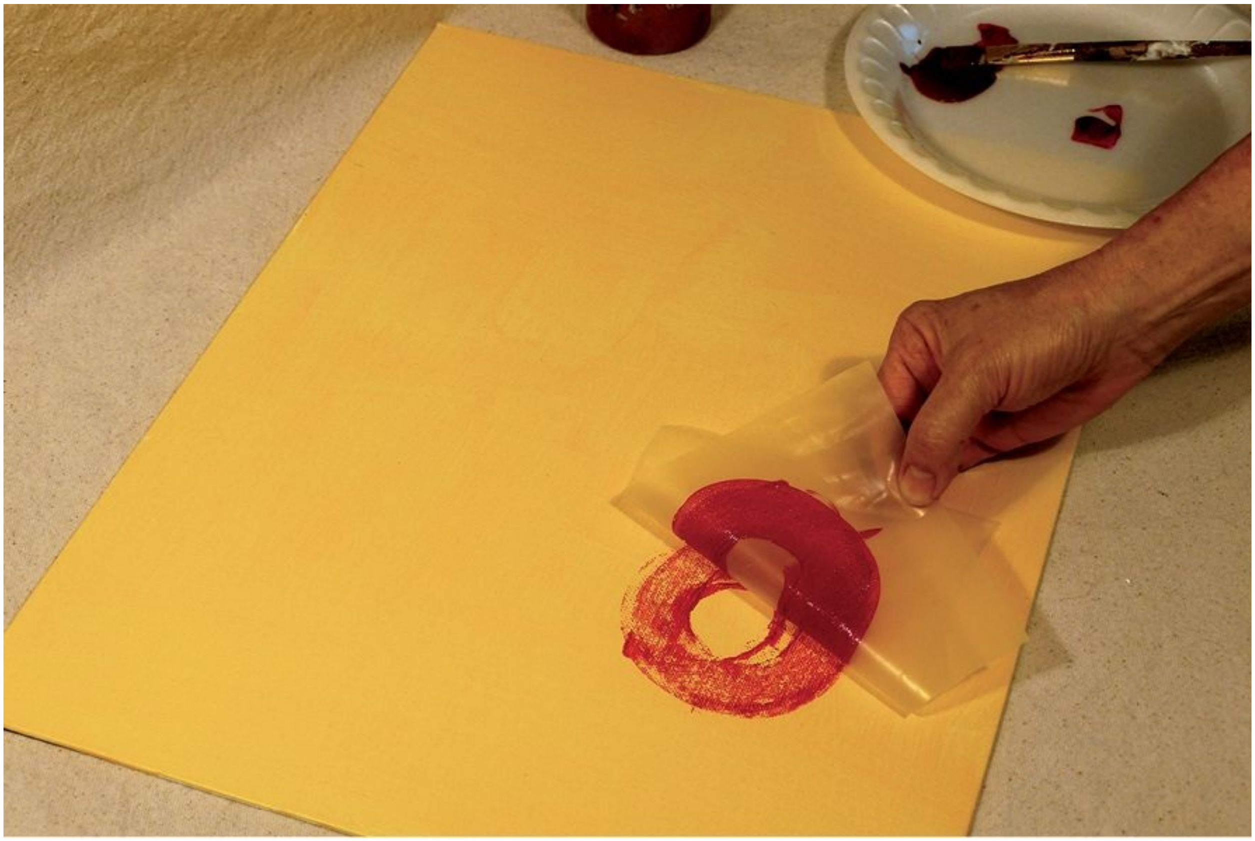
× 51cm) your piece of drop cloth would be roughly 7" × 8" (18cm × 20cm).



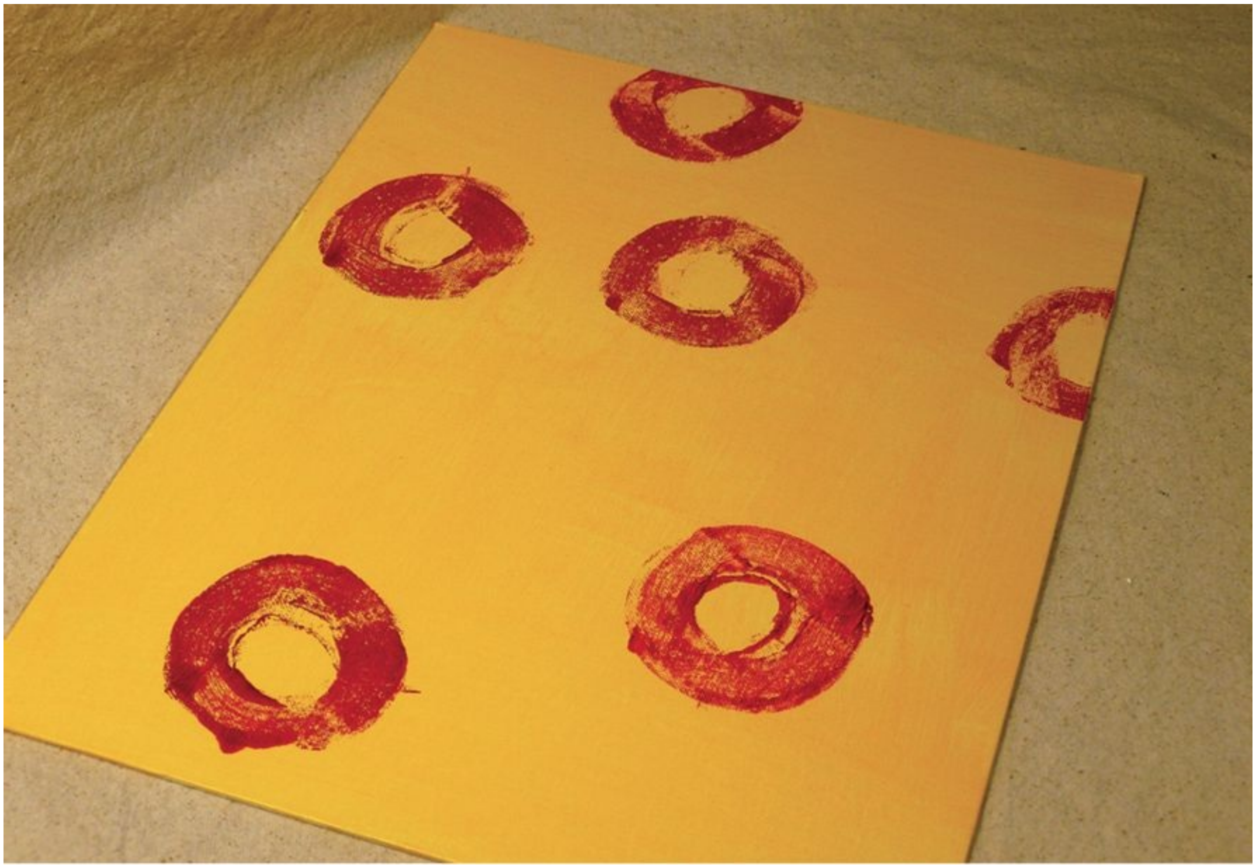
STEP 3 Paint a shape onto the plastic rectangle.



STEP 4 Lay this down onto the canvas or board and gently burnish it with your fingers. If you’re working on stretched canvas, you may want to use a sturdy piece of mat board behind the canvas, and support it with your free hand while you burnish.



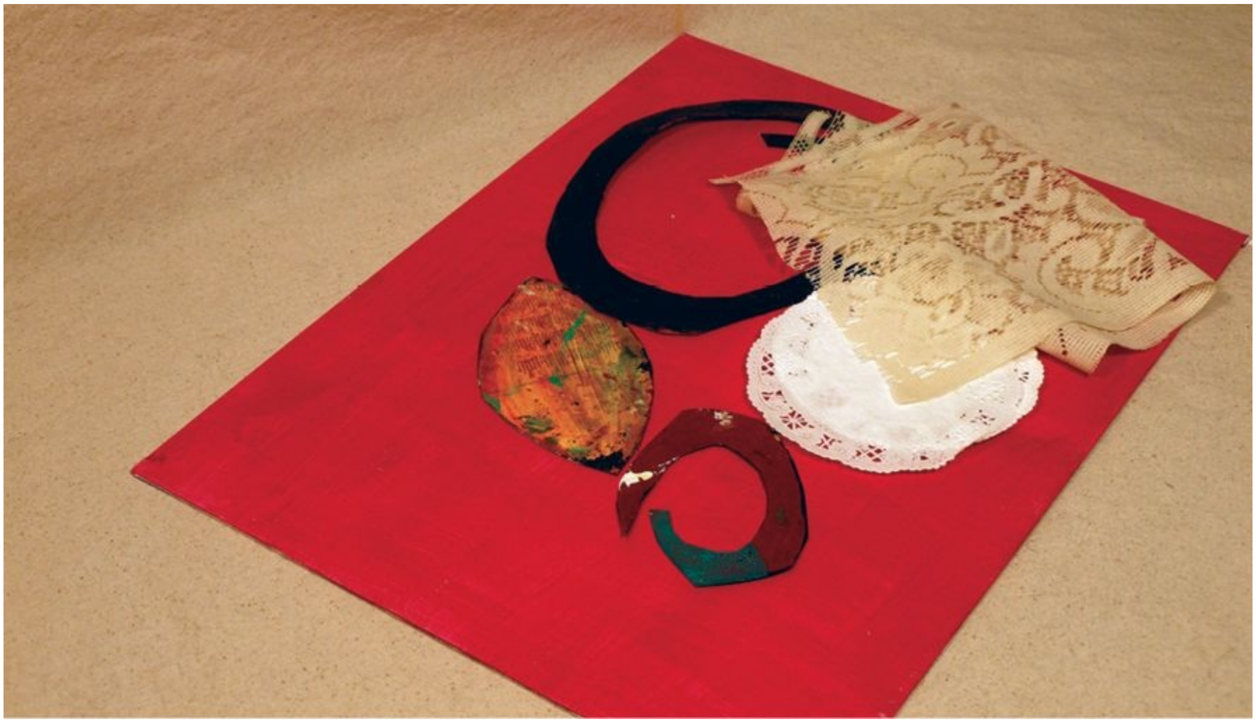
STEP 5 Pull up the plastic and take a look at the impression. You will probably see some lovely peaks and textures in the painted shape.



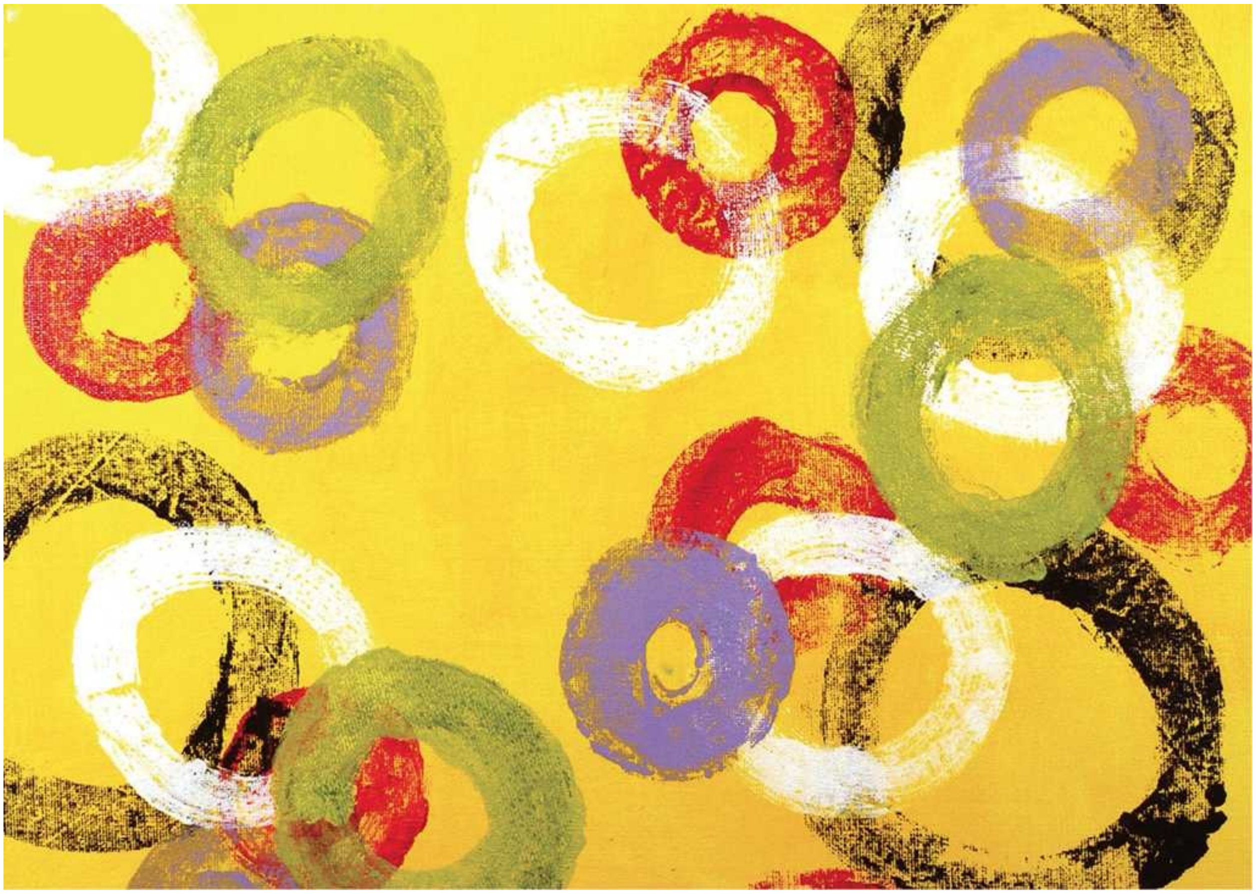
STEP 6 Repaint the shape with the same color and reprint it onto the canvas, changing the location.

Be sure to let the shape go off the canvas or paper in some places, too.

Proceed with this process of changing colors, rotating and overlapping the shapes however you like.



Instead of using a drop cloth, you can use ready-made shapes for this like doilies, lace and leaves. Try applying paint to a leaf from the front yard and gently burnishing it onto the canvas.



CIRCLE UP

Tesia Blackburn

Acrylic on painted canvas

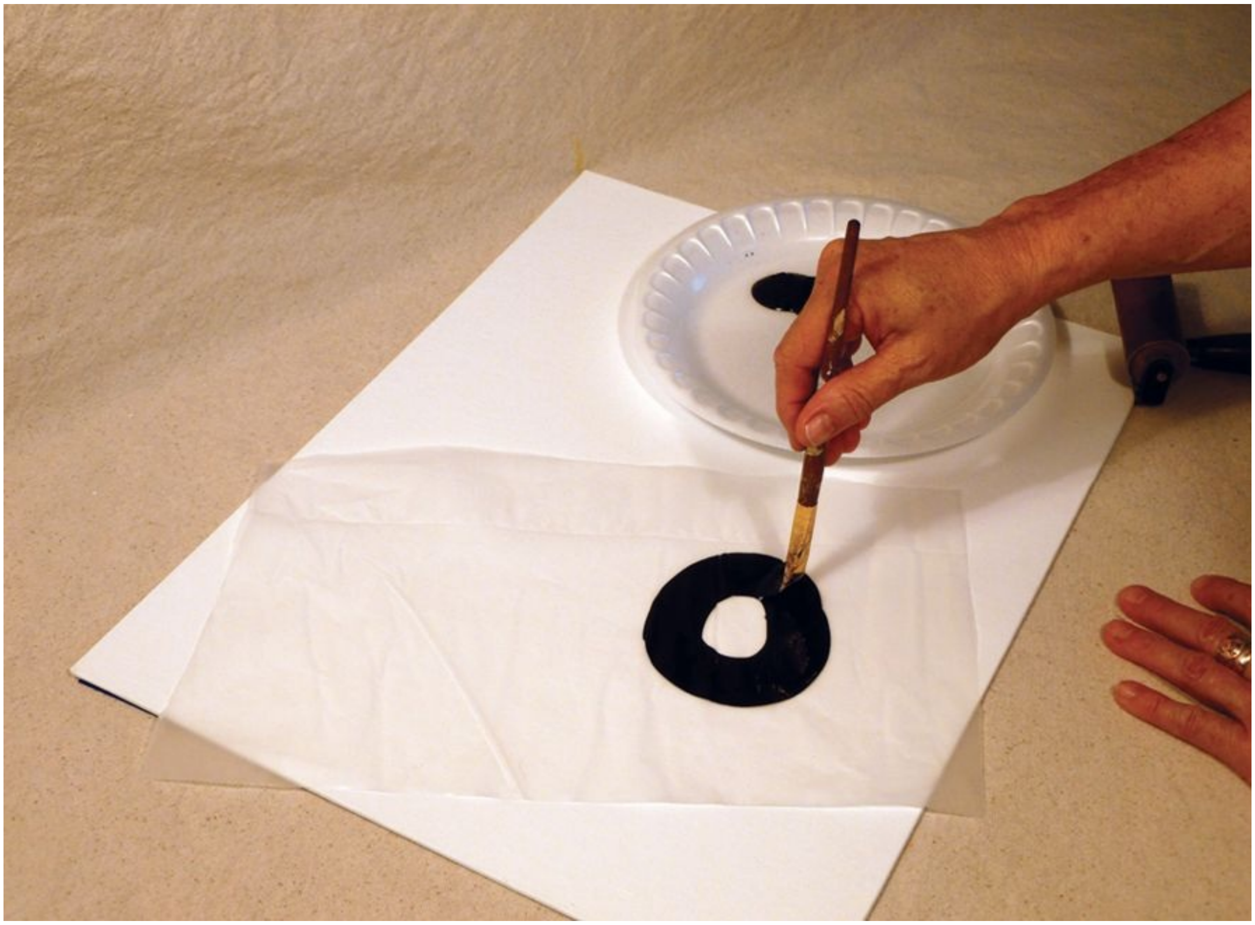
24" × 18" (61cm × 46cm)

ALTERNATE VERSION: SIMPLE OFFSET PRINTING WITH A BRAYER

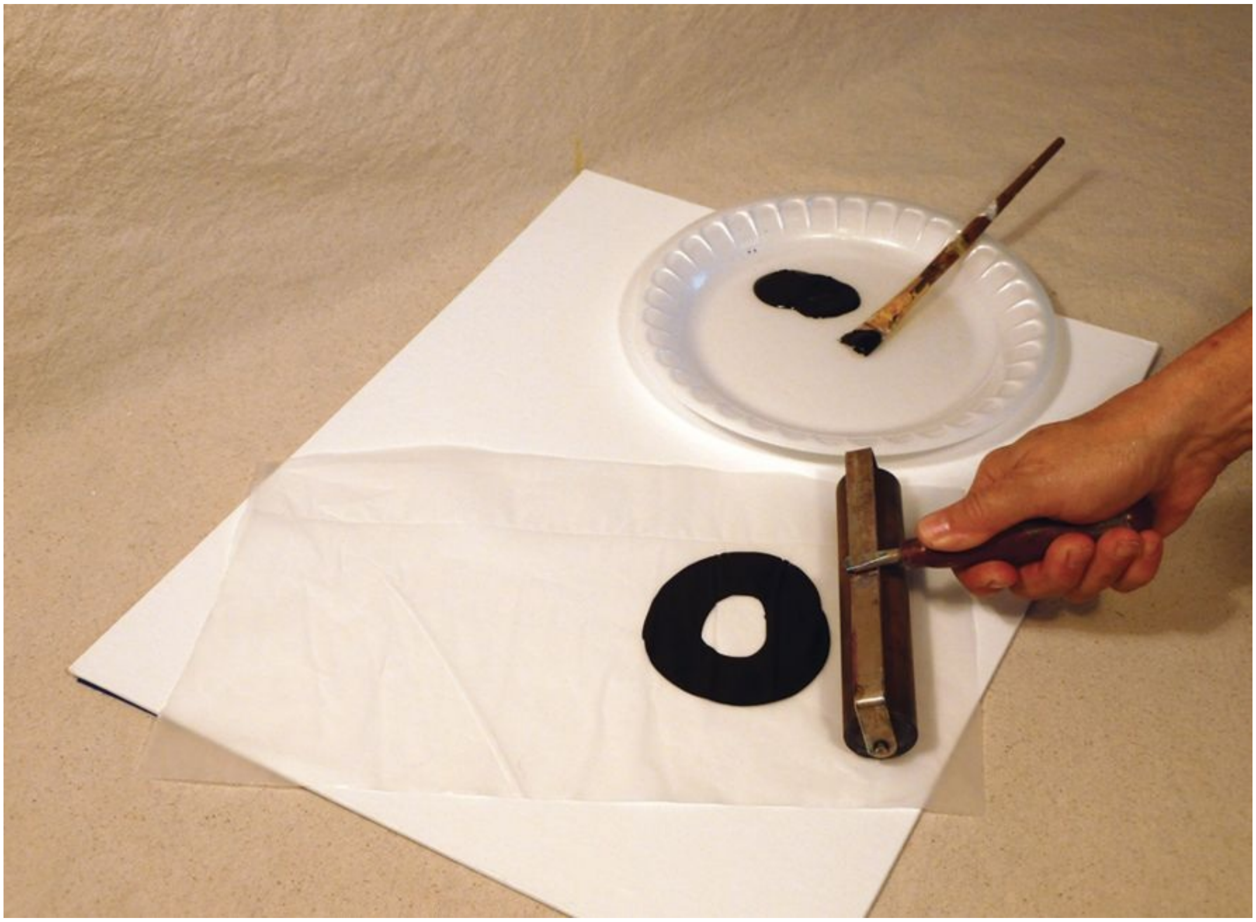
Instead of using your fingers to paint and to burnish, try using this technique to offset shapes onto a soft rubber brayer and then print them onto canvas.

Slow-Drying Acrylic

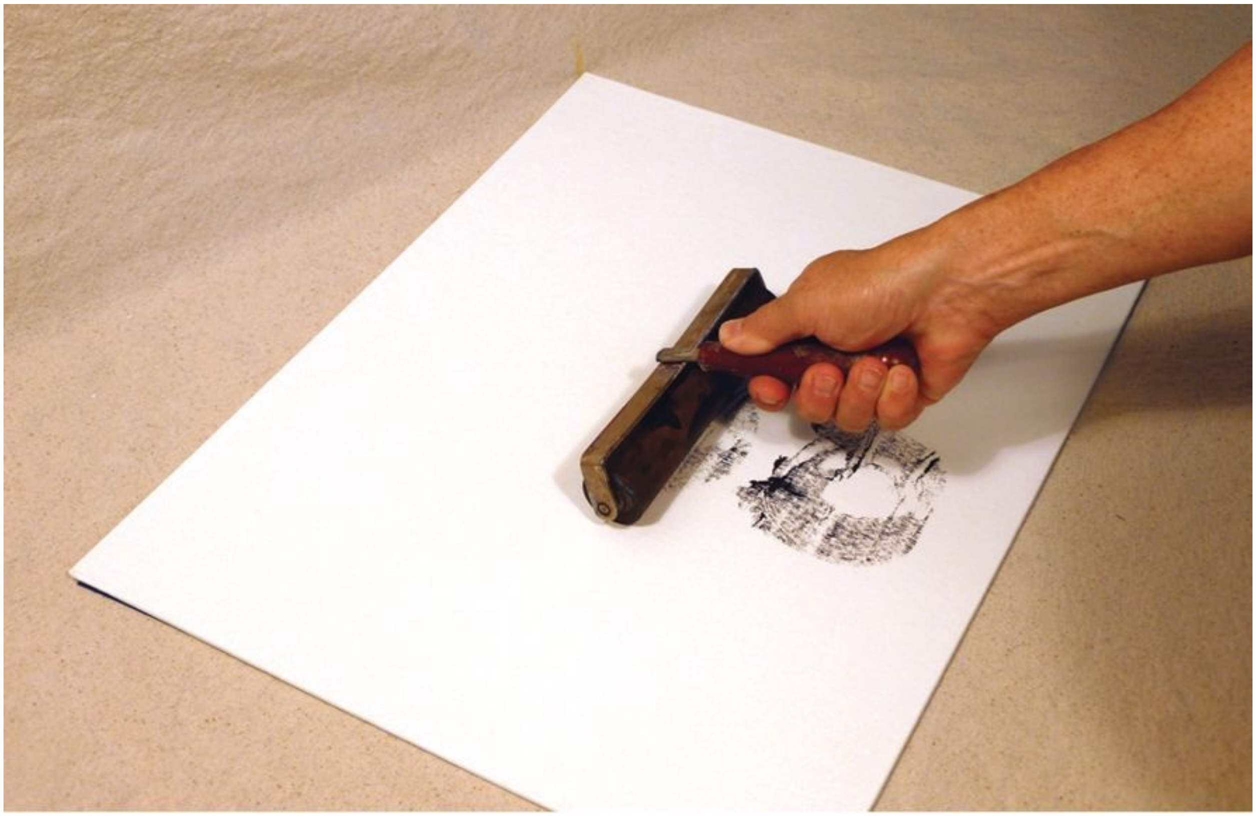
Golden OPEN is a very slow-drying acrylic that stays wet at least ten times longer than regular acrylics. This makes it great for the type of printing used in this exploration. It’s also very useful in hot weather when regular acrylics tend to dry much faster.



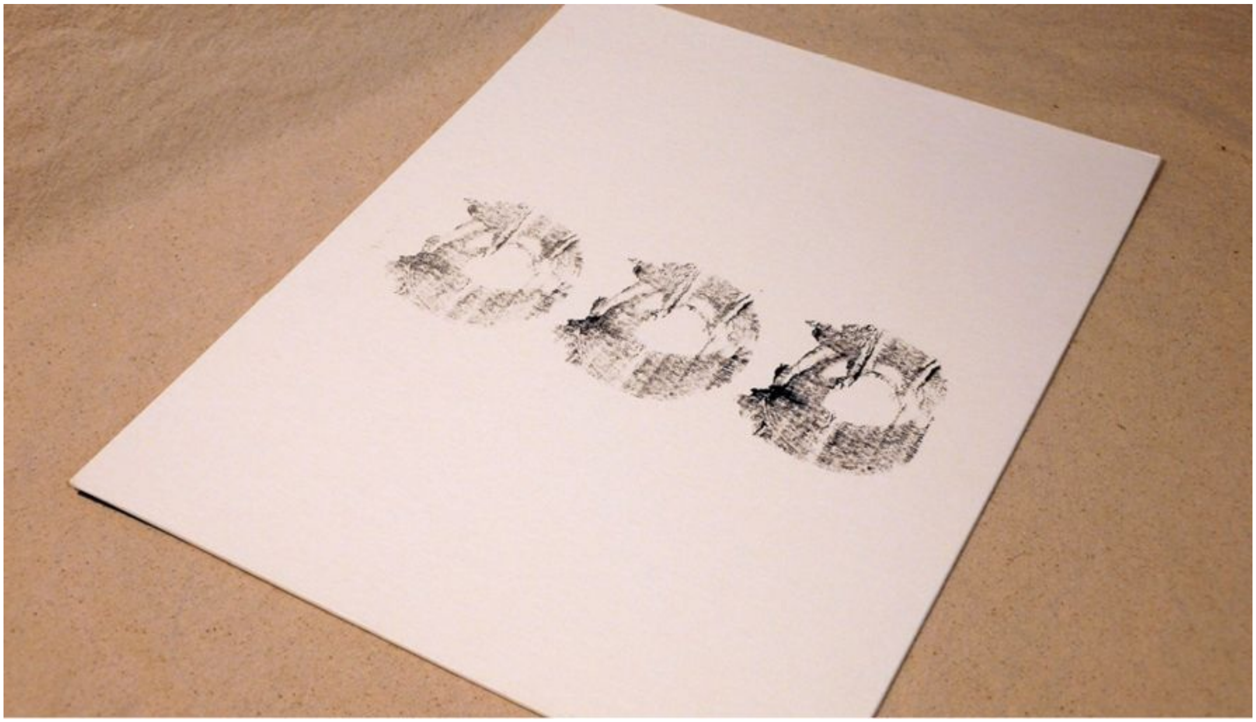
STEP 1 Lay out a piece of clear drop cloth. Paint a shape onto it with acrylic paint.



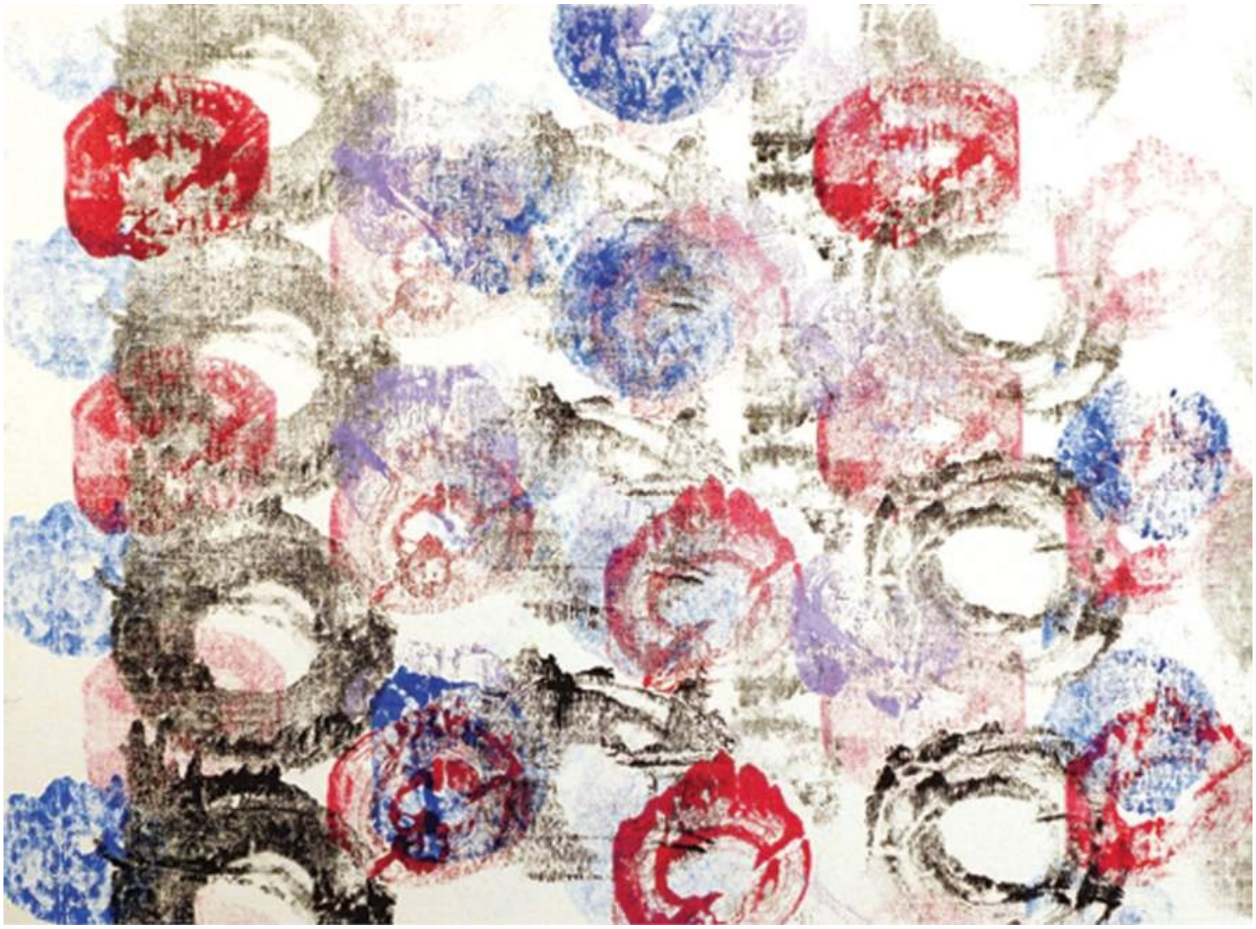
STEP 2 Roll a clean brayer over the painted shape to offset the shape onto the brayer.



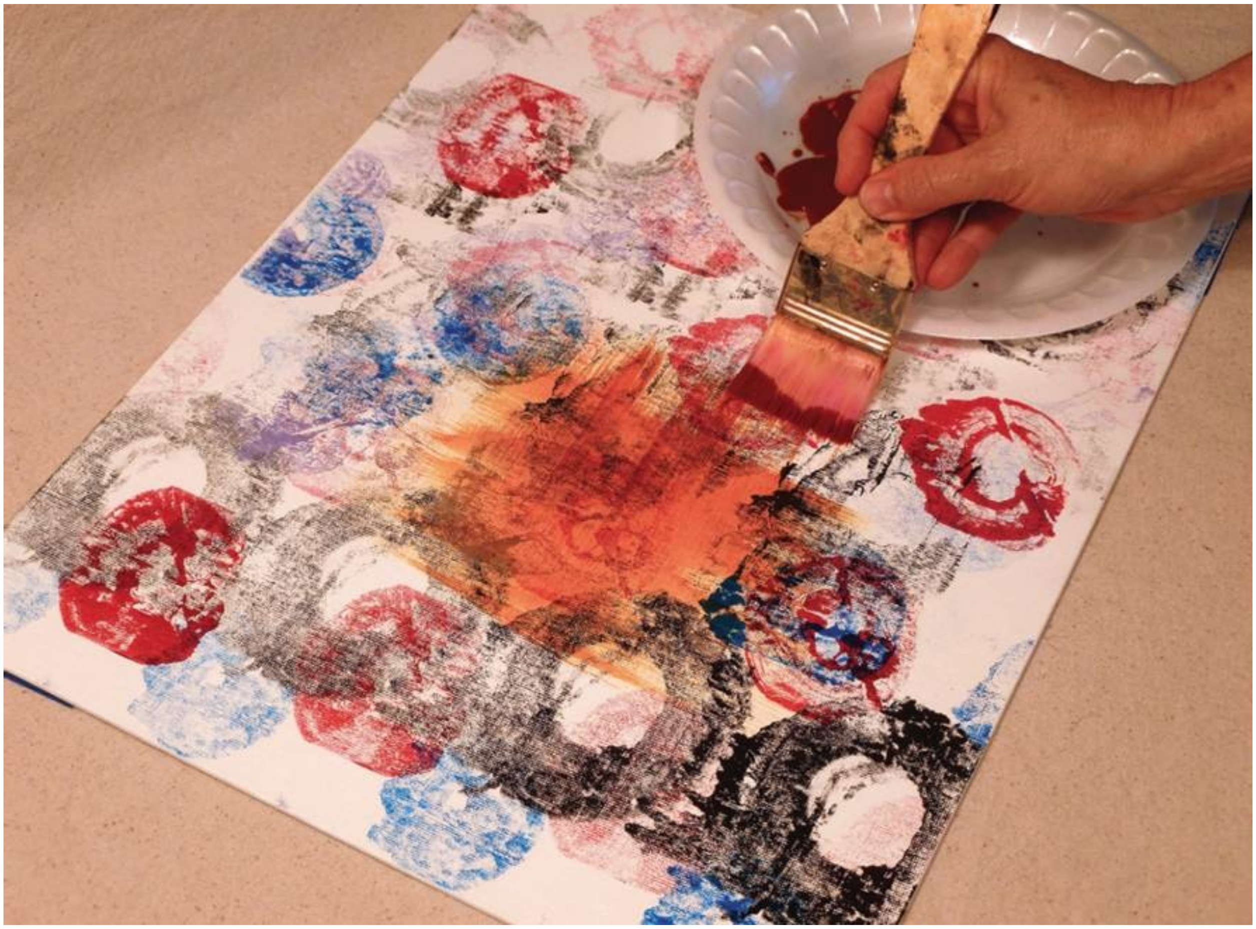
STEP 3A Roll the brayer with the painted shape onto the clean paper or canvas and …



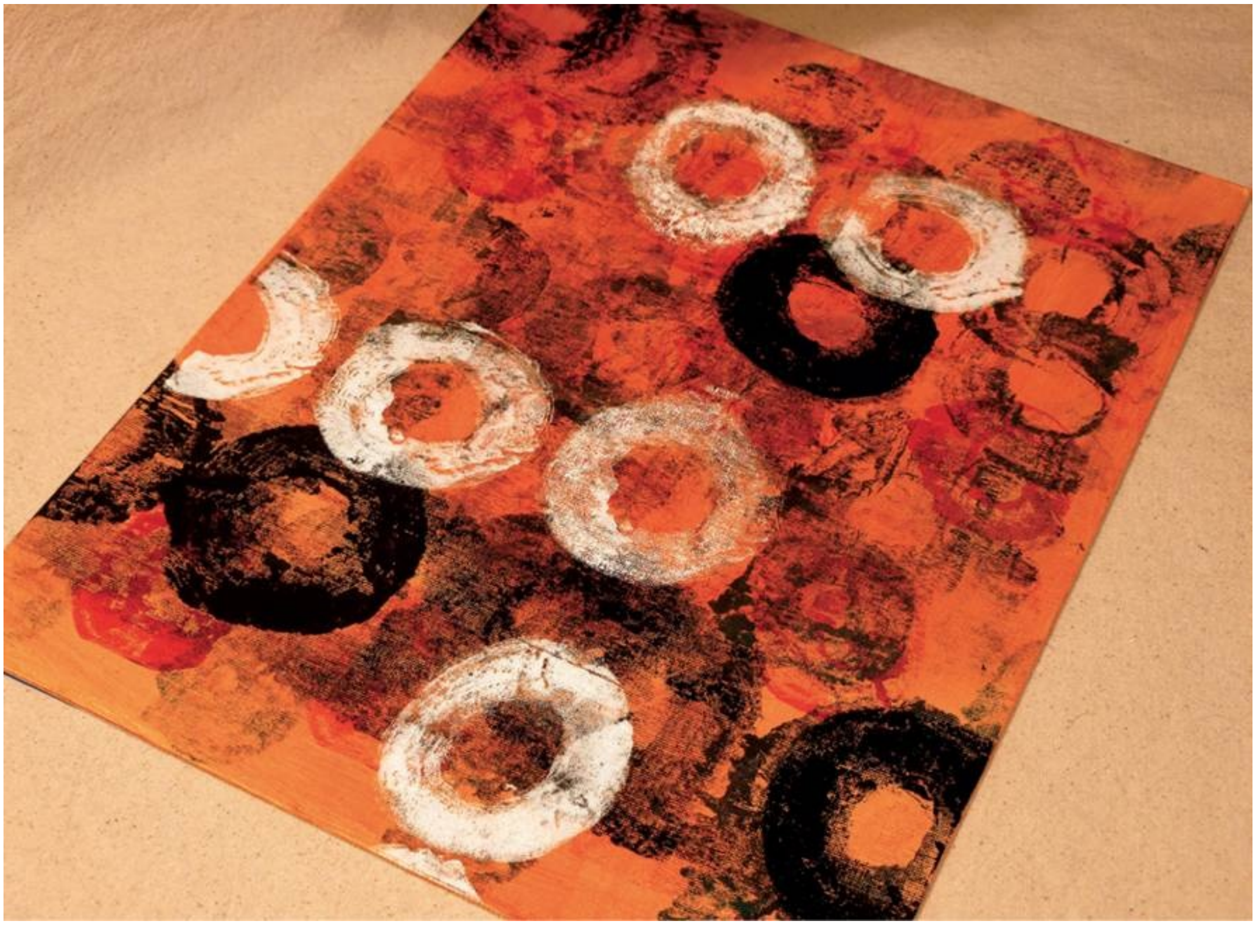
STEP 3B *Voilá!* The image is offset onto the surface of the canvas. Cool!



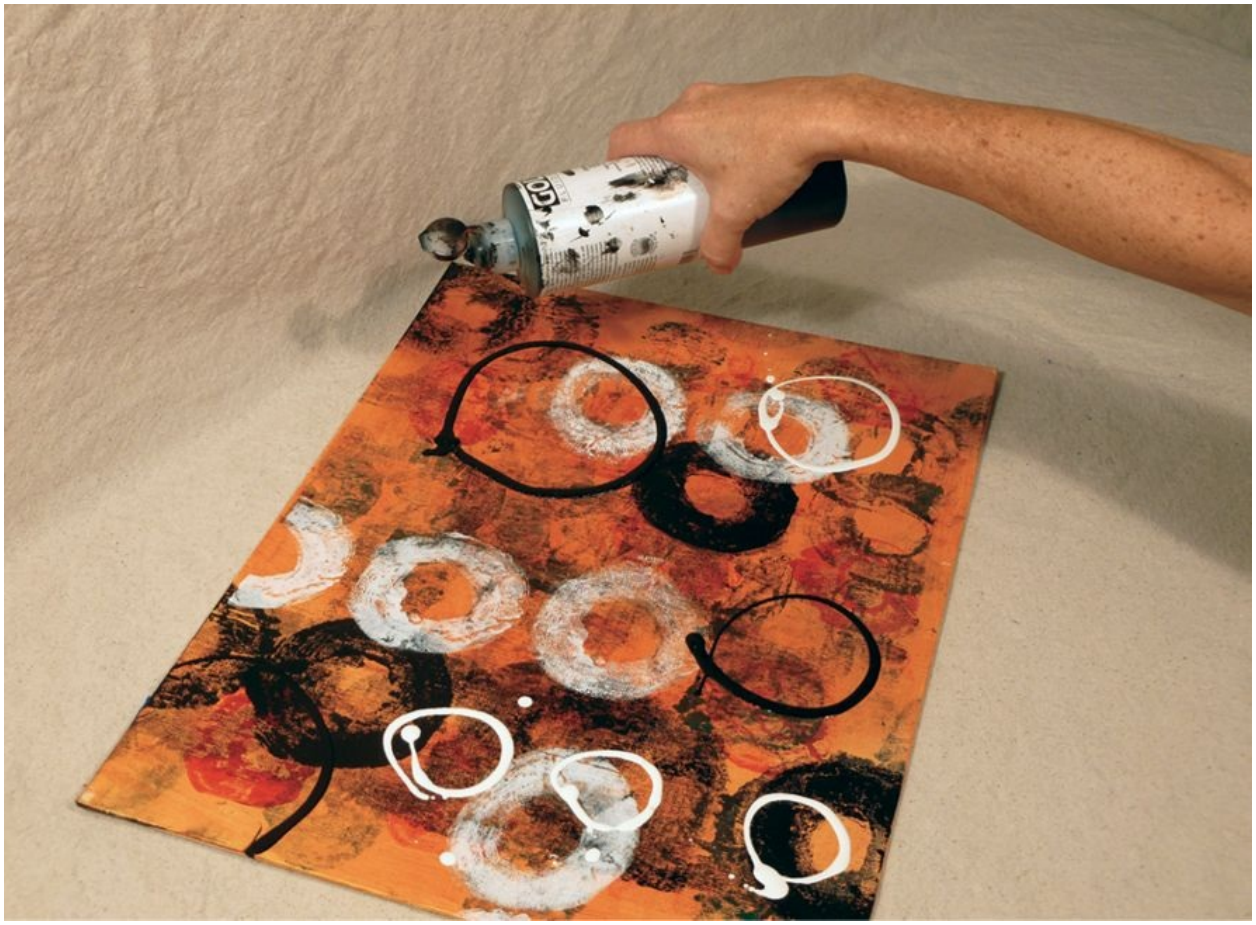
STEP 4 Continue rolling the shapes off onto the canvas, varying the colors.



STEP 5 Once the shape layers have dried, cover the canvas with a thin layer of Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold fluid. Let dry.



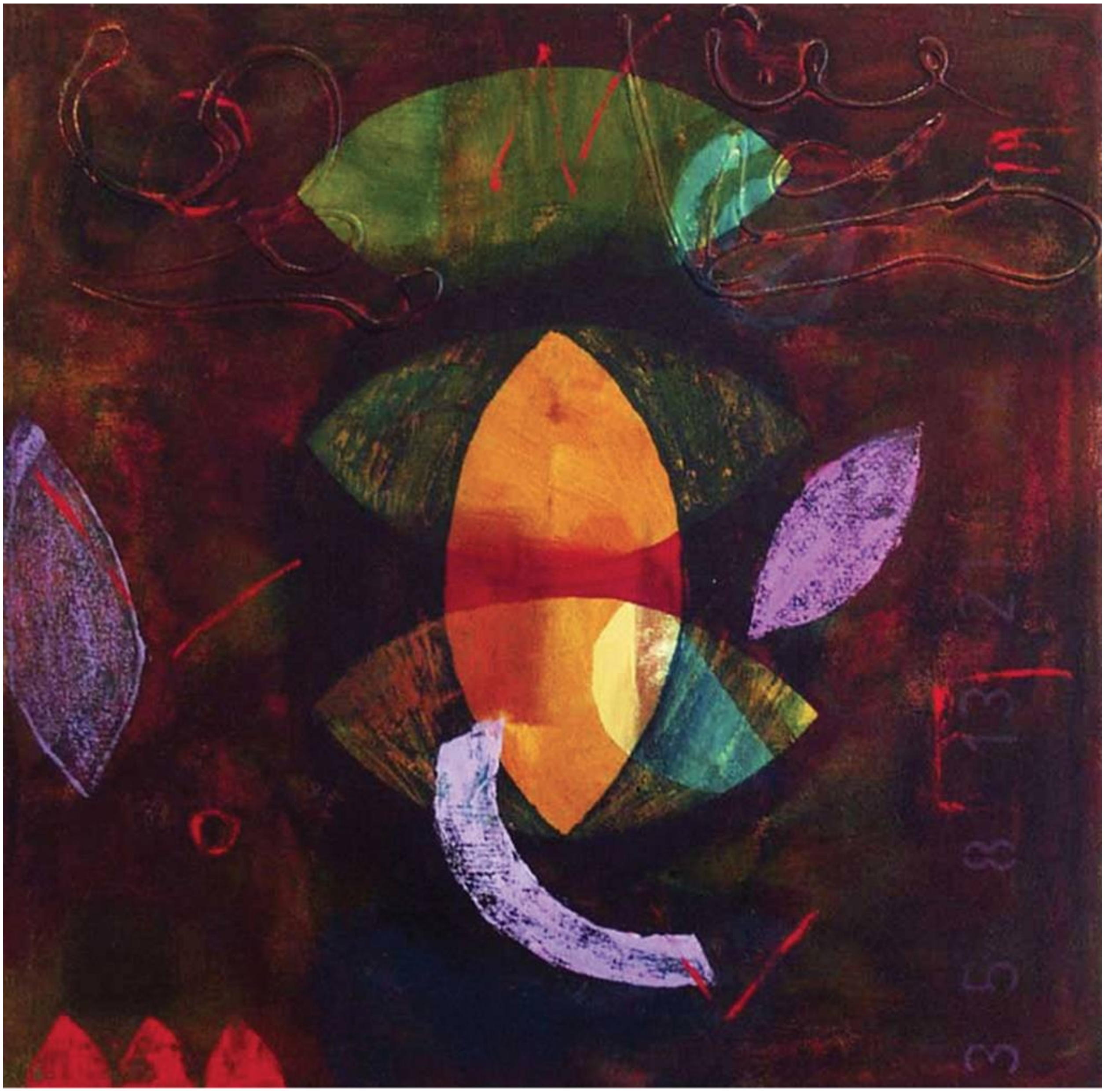
STEP 6 Repeat the shapes on top of the dried Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold fluid with Carbon Black and Titanium White.



STEP 7 As a final touch, drip circles with fluid Carbon Black and Titanium White.

USING A REPEATED MOTIF TO CREATE A SERIES

By using the same design element or motif, you can create a series that will flow from piece to piece. In the following three examples I repeated the mandorla (almond shape).

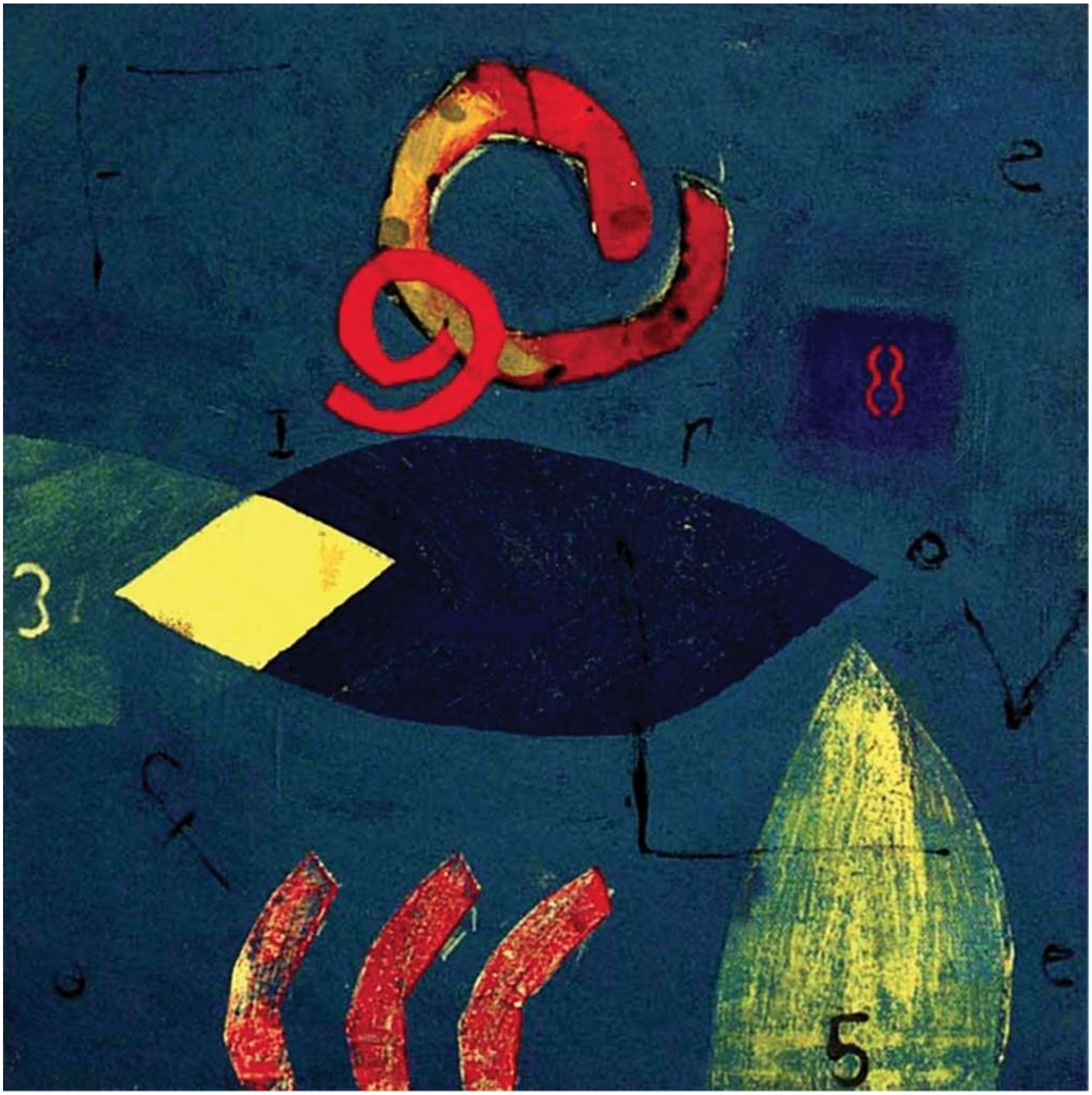


ONE LOVE

Tesia Blackburn

Acrylic on canvas

24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)

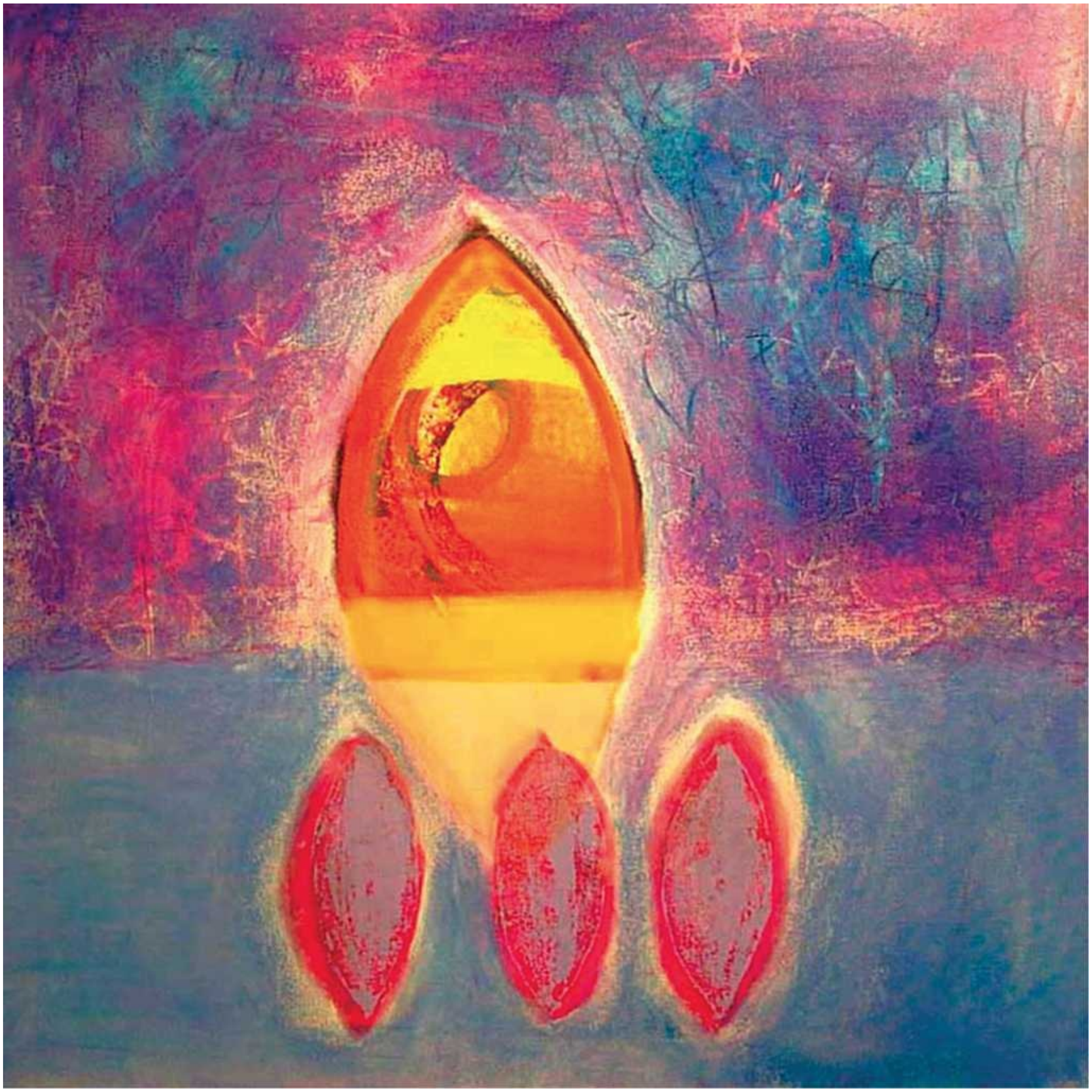


FIRE OF LOVE

Tesia Blackburn

Acrylic on canvas

12" × 12" (31cm × 31cm)



SACRED LOVE VIII

Tesia Blackburn

Acrylic on canvas

24" × 24" (61cm × 61cm)

EXPLORATION FIVE

Fifteen “What-Ifs?”

Throughout my career as an artist I’ve been stumped *many* times. Sometimes I get to a point with a painting and then just hit a wall. I can’t think what to do next. You’d be surprised how many times seasoned, professional artists hit a dry patch like this. If you’re just starting out, you’re likely to feel as if you have nothing but walls to scale.

I’d like to introduce you to my secret weapon: What If?

I can’t take full credit for this. Many, many years ago I found this little gem in a tiny book called *The Blank Canvas* by Anna Held Audette. I took the practice of asking this question to heart and have used it as my go-to technique for years. It has served me well and I hope it works for you, too.

“The soul never thinks without a picture.” —Aristotle

What if you had no obstacles to making art?

Plainly put, take whatever issue you have and insert a *What-If?* For instance, you're having trouble with color? What if you paint in black and white for six months? Can't imagine finding space to paint? What if your paintings are the size of postage stamps (like my pal Robert-Jean Ray) and your studio is a cigar box? What if your canvas has a hole in the middle? What if you paint with chopsticks? What if you glue shredded packing material to your canvas?

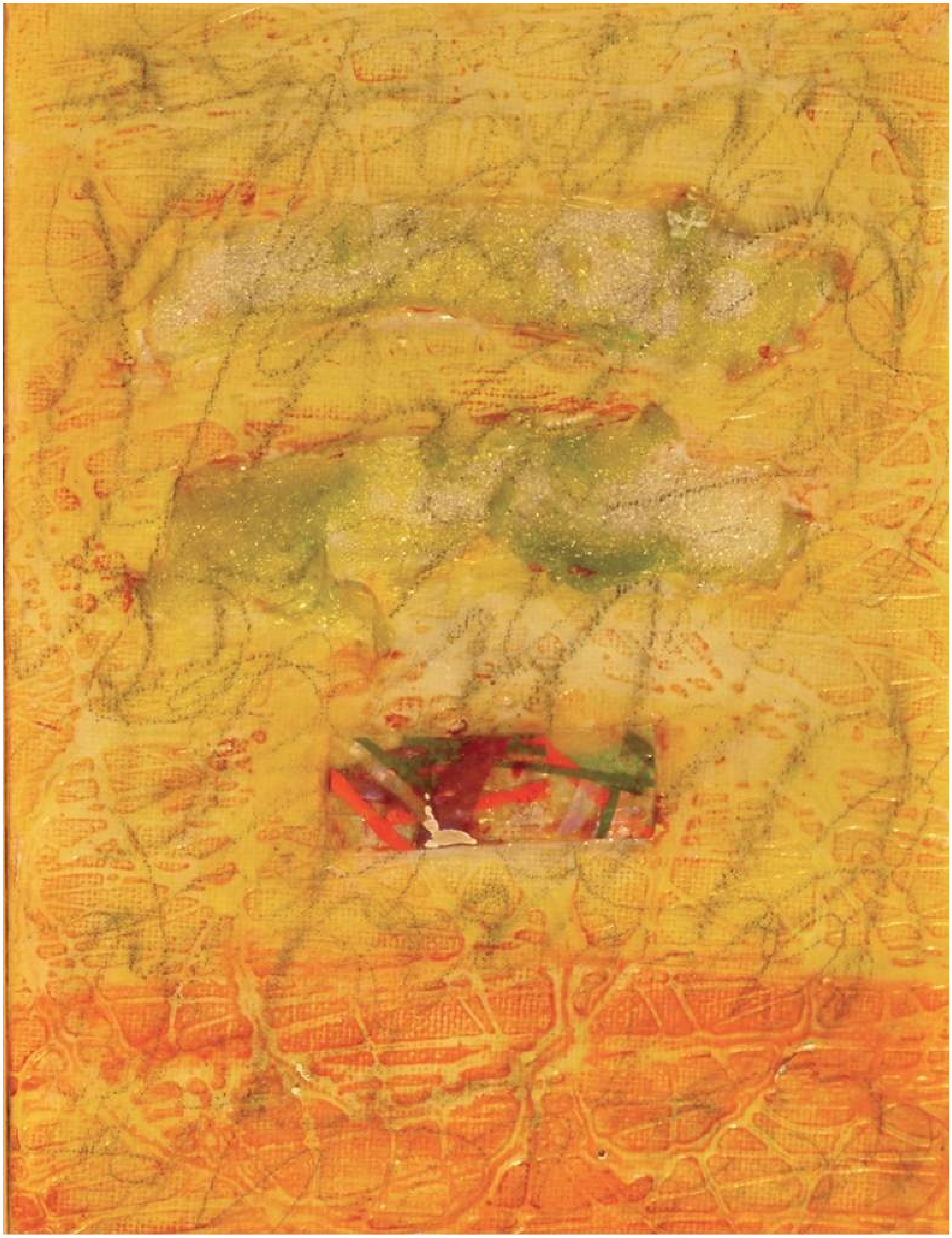
You get the idea. I'm giving you permission to mow down any obstacles you have or just plain ignore them. This isn't just pie-in-the-sky stuff either. Each piece of art in this chapter started life as a *What-If*.

Play, have fun, smile, breathe. Repeat.

What if you became an artist today?

1. WHAT IF YOU TURNED YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER OR YOUR NIECE INTO A BUTTERFLY?

I painted the board with a thin layer of Green Gold and Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold and let it dry. Then I collaged an image of an old gateway on top. I found some butterfly wings that would fit on the photograph of my granddaughter, Raven, and collaged them onto the background. Then I collaged the photograph of Raven on top. I added a couple of fleur-de-lis motifs on the left made with light molding paste pushed through a commercial stencil and I toned them with Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold.

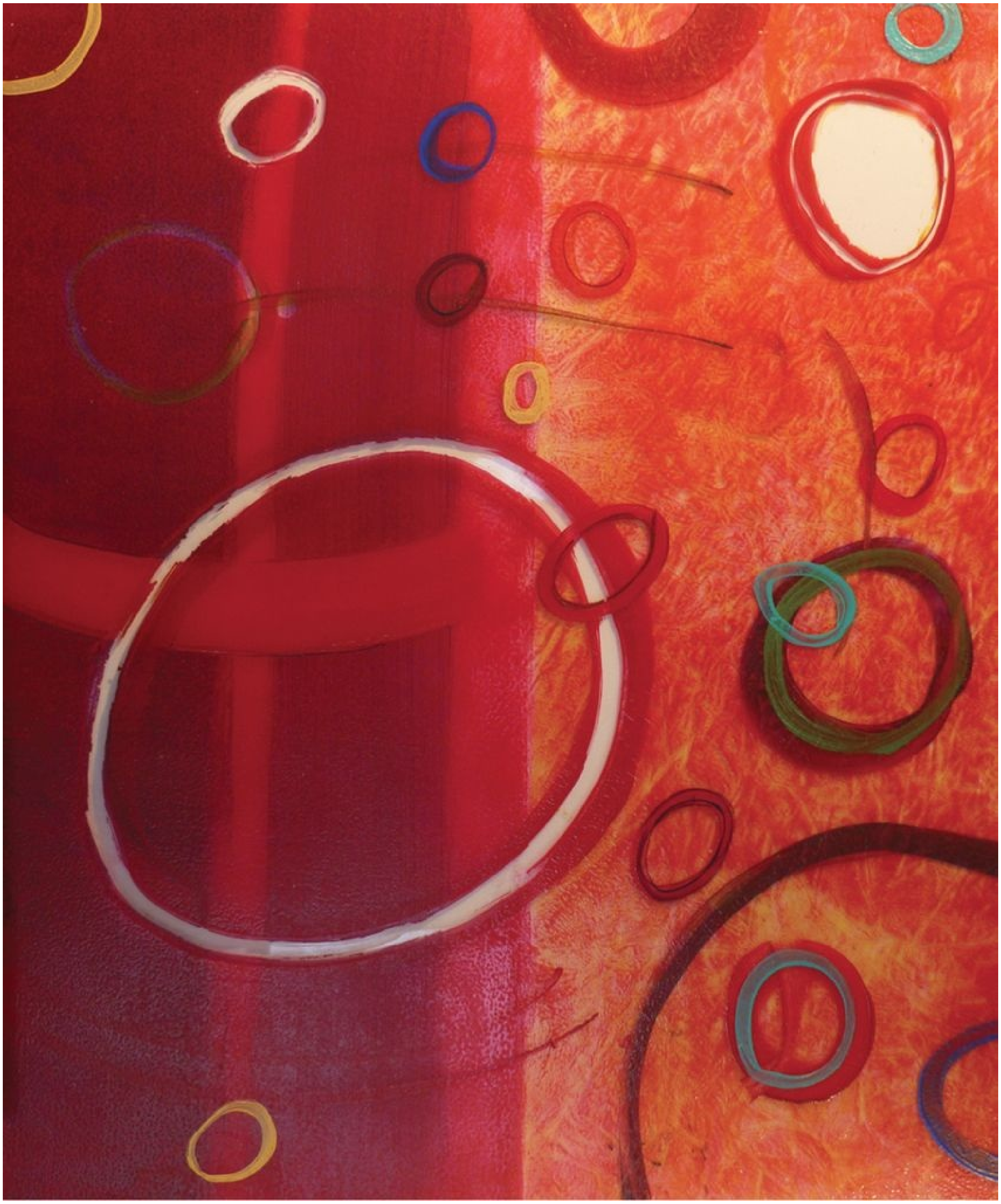


2. WHAT IF YOU GLUED ACRYLIC SKINS TO A BACKGROUND FOR TEXTURE?

First I wrote some words in pencil on the canvas. Then I painted the background with a little Hansa Yellow and Transparent Pyrrole Orange. I dripped a little Clear Tar Gel and let that dry. I found some pieces of dried acrylic skins stuck to the side of my Glass Bead Gel jar, so I glued them down on top with a little gloss gel.

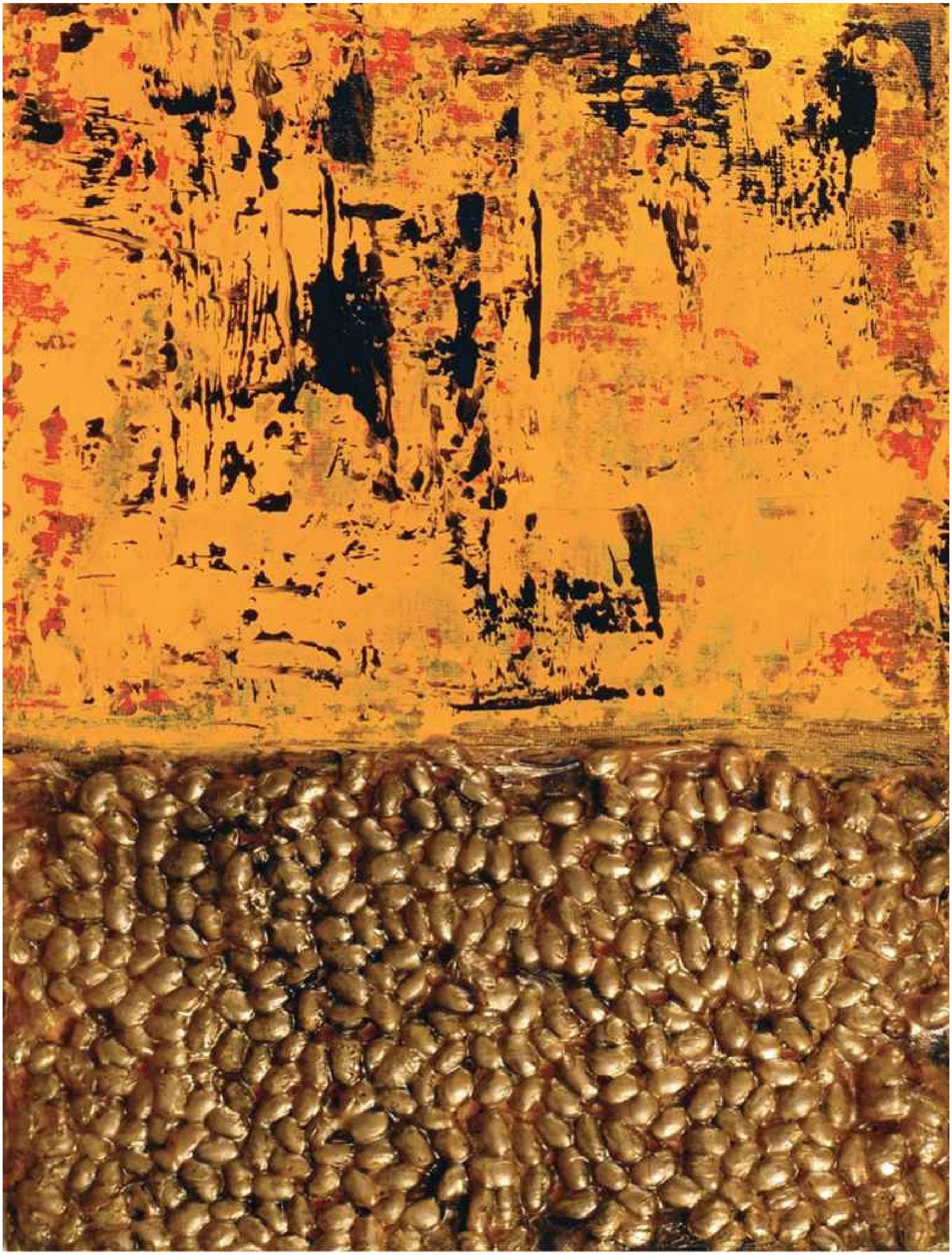
3. WHAT IF YOU POUR GLOSS MEDIUM OVER THE CANVAS?

First I laid down a background of Fine Pumice Gel mixed with Hansa Yellow and let that dry. I drew on top of that with vine charcoal. The grittiness of the pumice held on to the charcoal. I burnished the charcoal down into the pumice a little as well and sprayed a thin layer of fixative over the charcoal. I laid down a mixture of Green Gold and Glass Bead Gel on the top and bottom and let that dry. I poured a layer of gloss medium mixed with Quinacridone Magenta in a ratio of 10:1 and let that dry. For a final touch I dripped Teal, Pyrrole Orange and Carbon Black dots and lines on top.



4. WHAT IF YOU PAINT ON PLEXIGLAS?

Acrylic bonds well to Plexiglas. It makes a unique surface and is double-sided, so you can see what you paint on both sides. An added benefit of painting on Plexiglas is that it will cast a shadow on the wall behind it. This makes for a very interesting presentation.

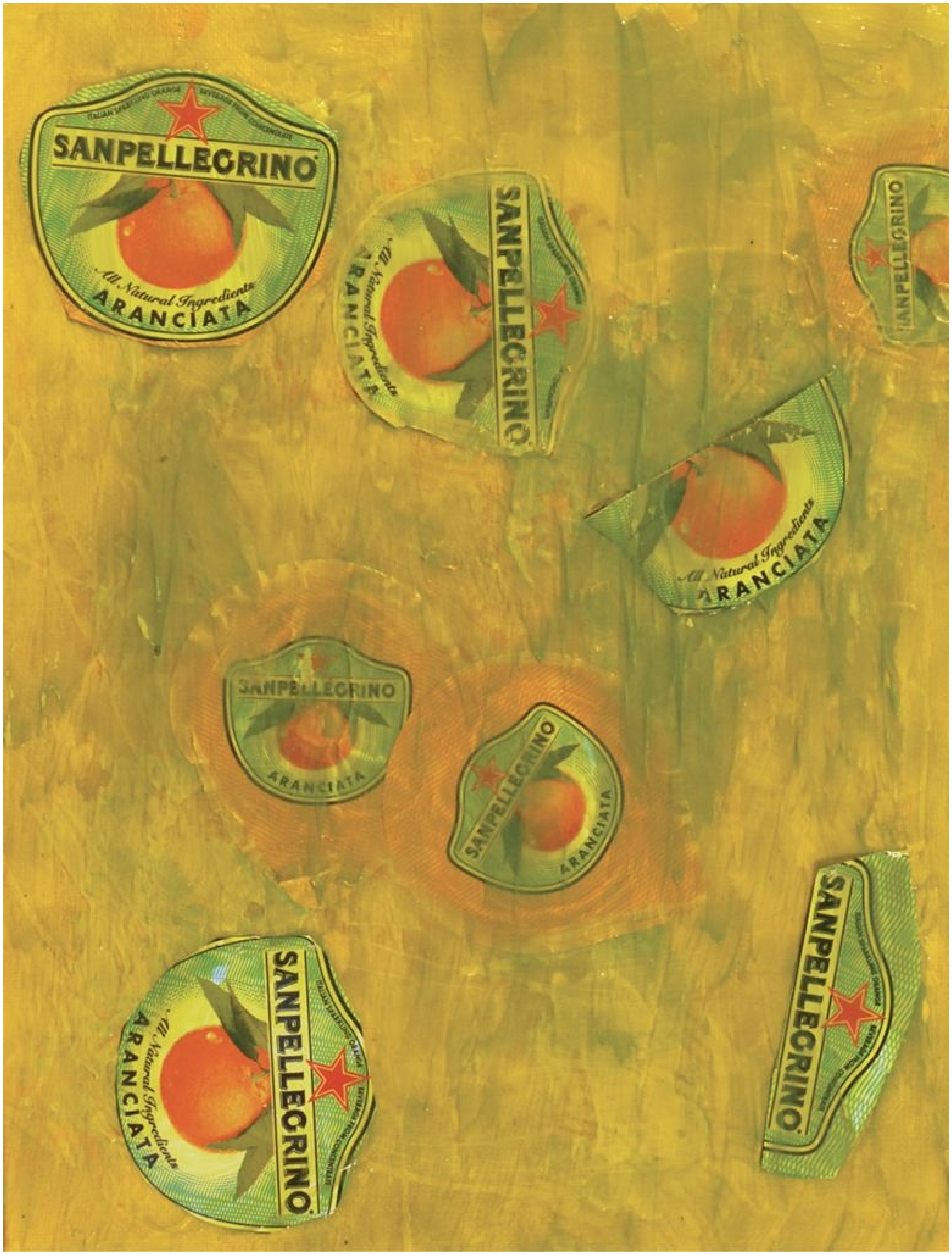


5. WHAT IF YOU GLUED BEANS TO THE CANVAS?

(You’re probably wondering where I get these ideas. Sometimes they just pop into my head.) First I toned the canvas with Hansa Yellow and muted that with a little Ultramarine Violet. I just scumbled the colors, letting lots of textural marks show. Then I glued the beans down with matte gel because I wanted a waxy look. When it all dried, which took overnight, I painted the beans with Iridescent Bronze and worked a little Carbon Black into the top for contrast.

6. WHAT IF YOU DOODLE WITH PENCIL ON THE CANVAS?

Here I’ve doodled on the canvas with a water-soluble pencil. I really like the Sketch & Wash made by General Pencil. I added in a little bit of Quinacridone Magenta mixed with a tiny bit of water. Because there’s a little bit of water in the paint, it will blur and smudge the pencil, which I really like. Once it was dry, I darkened a couple of spots with the pencil for contrast.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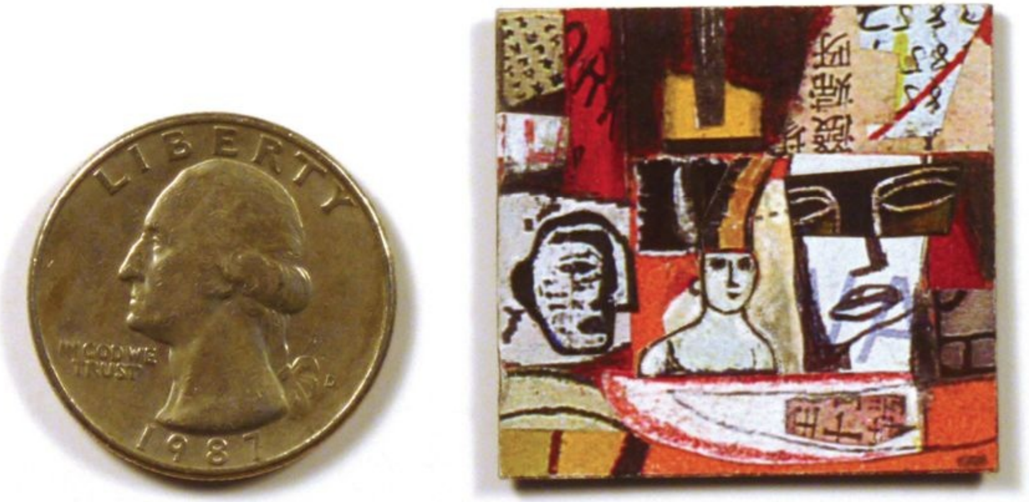
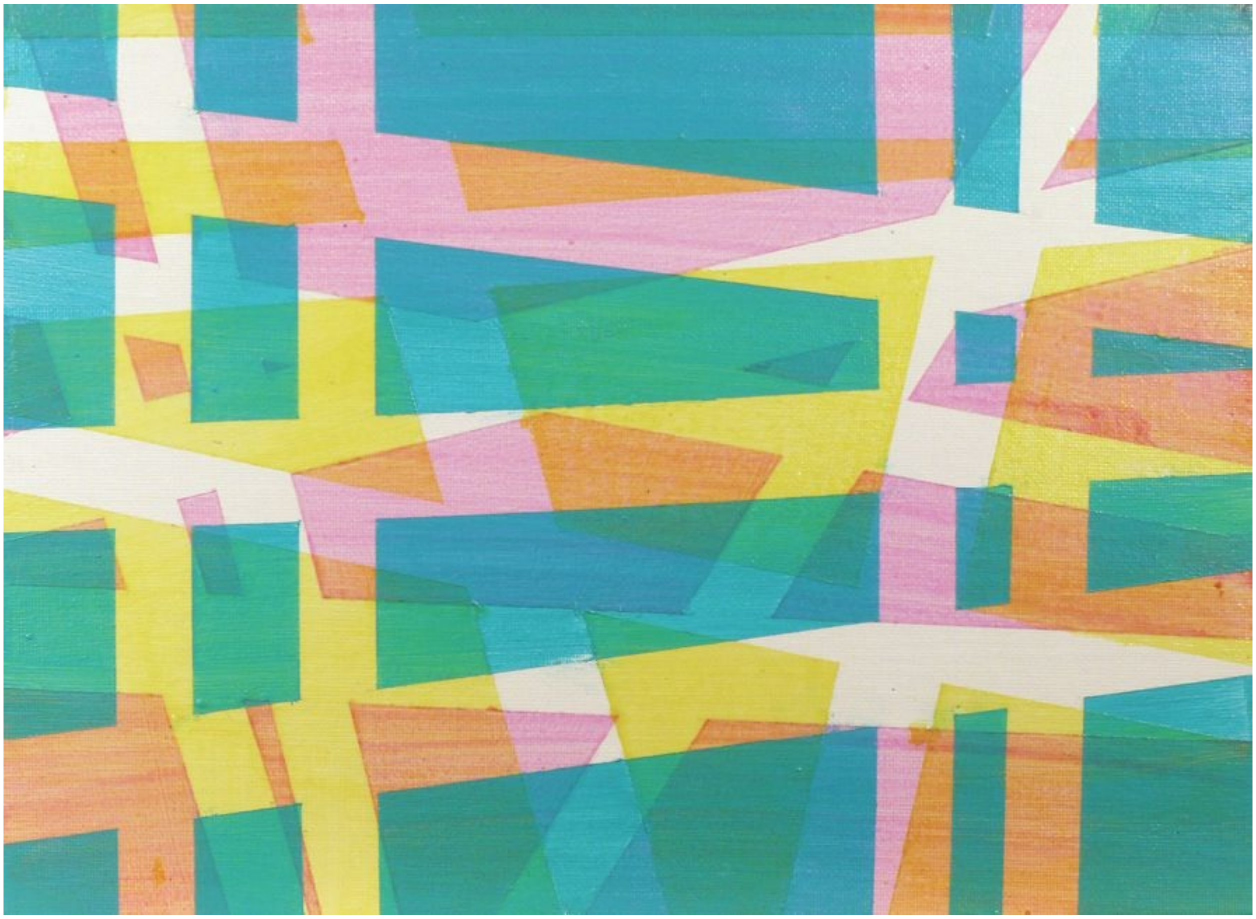
7. WHAT IF YOU USE PRODUCE LABELS AS COLLAGE ELEMENTS?

First I toned the canvas with Green Gold. Then I cut out the labels from the soda cans. I mixed a liberal amount of matte gel and Green Gold together and covered the canvas with it. I pushed the thin aluminum labels down into the soft gel/Green Gold mixture and covered them with it as well. I took a little bit of the soft gel mixture off a couple of the labels so they would show clearly.



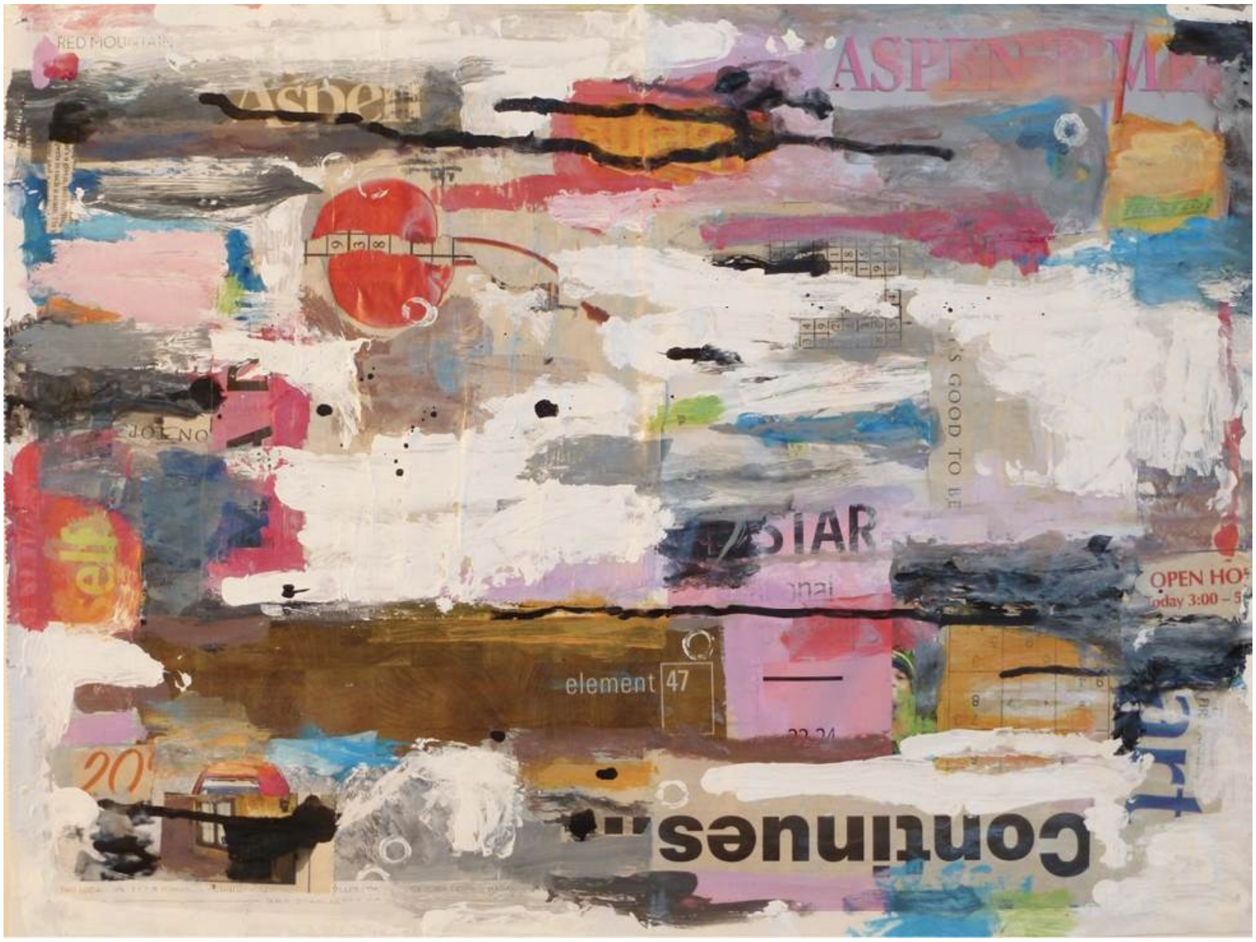
8. WHAT IF YOU HAVE NO SPACE TO MAKE ART?

Make small art. This piece by my pal Robert-Jean Ray is only 1" by 1" (3cm × 3cm) and really answers the question, “Does art have to be big to be important?” The answer is a resounding “No!”



9. WHAT IF YOU USE TAPE AS A RESIST?

Starting with a white canvas, I laid down five or six strips of tape and covered them with a layer of clear polymer and let this dry. This seals the tape so the fluid paint will not bleed under it. Next I painted a thin layer of Quinacridone Magenta and let it dry. I pulled up the tape to reveal the white of the canvas where the tape had resisted the paint. For the next layer I again laid down five or six pieces of tape and covered them with clear polymer medium. When that dried I covered the canvas with a layer of Green Gold and let that dry. Then I took up the tape. For the last layer I again used five or six pieces of tape, covered them with polymer medium and let that dry. I painted the final layer in Teal fluid, laid it down fairly heavy so it would be more opaque, let it dry and pulled up the tape.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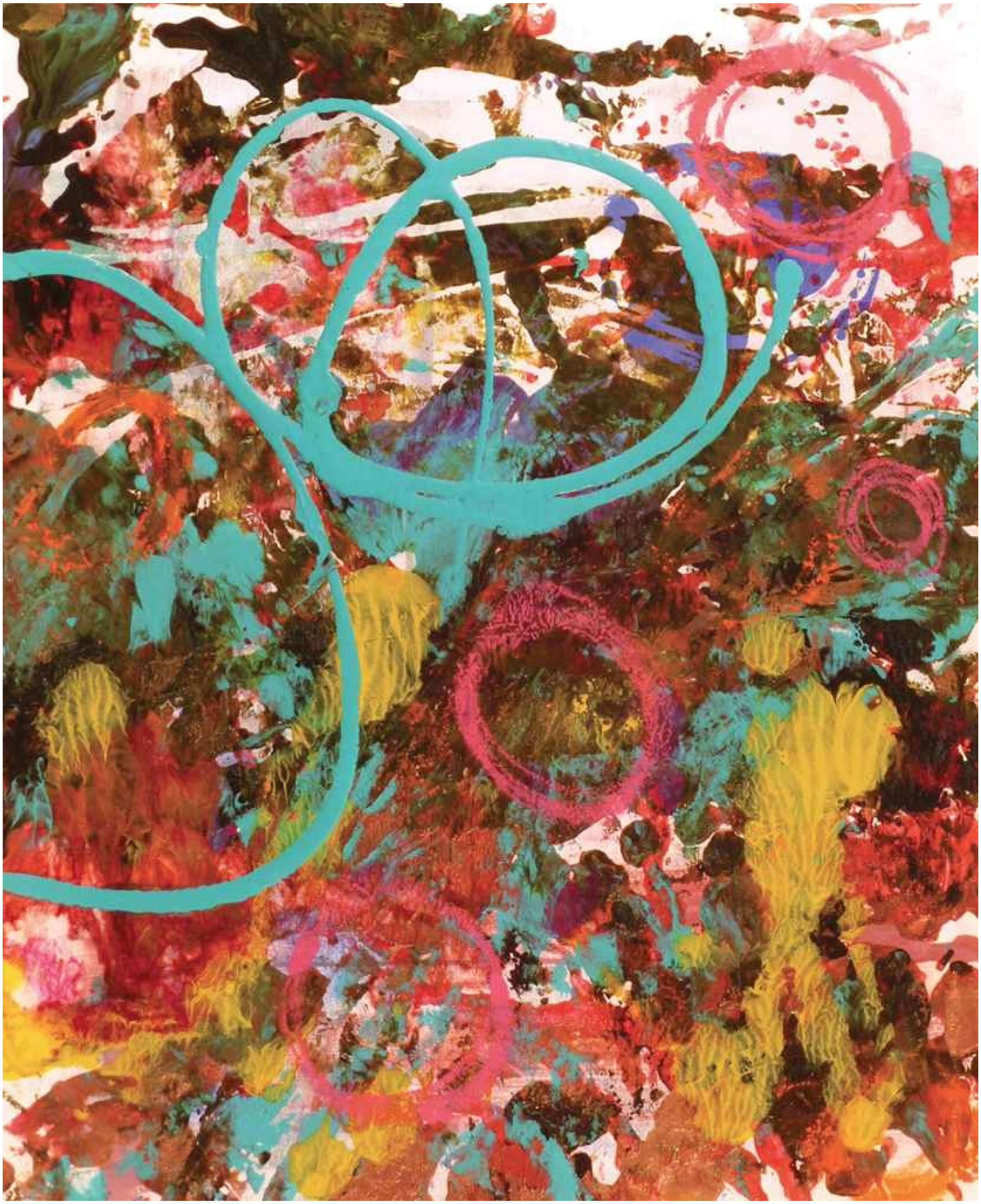
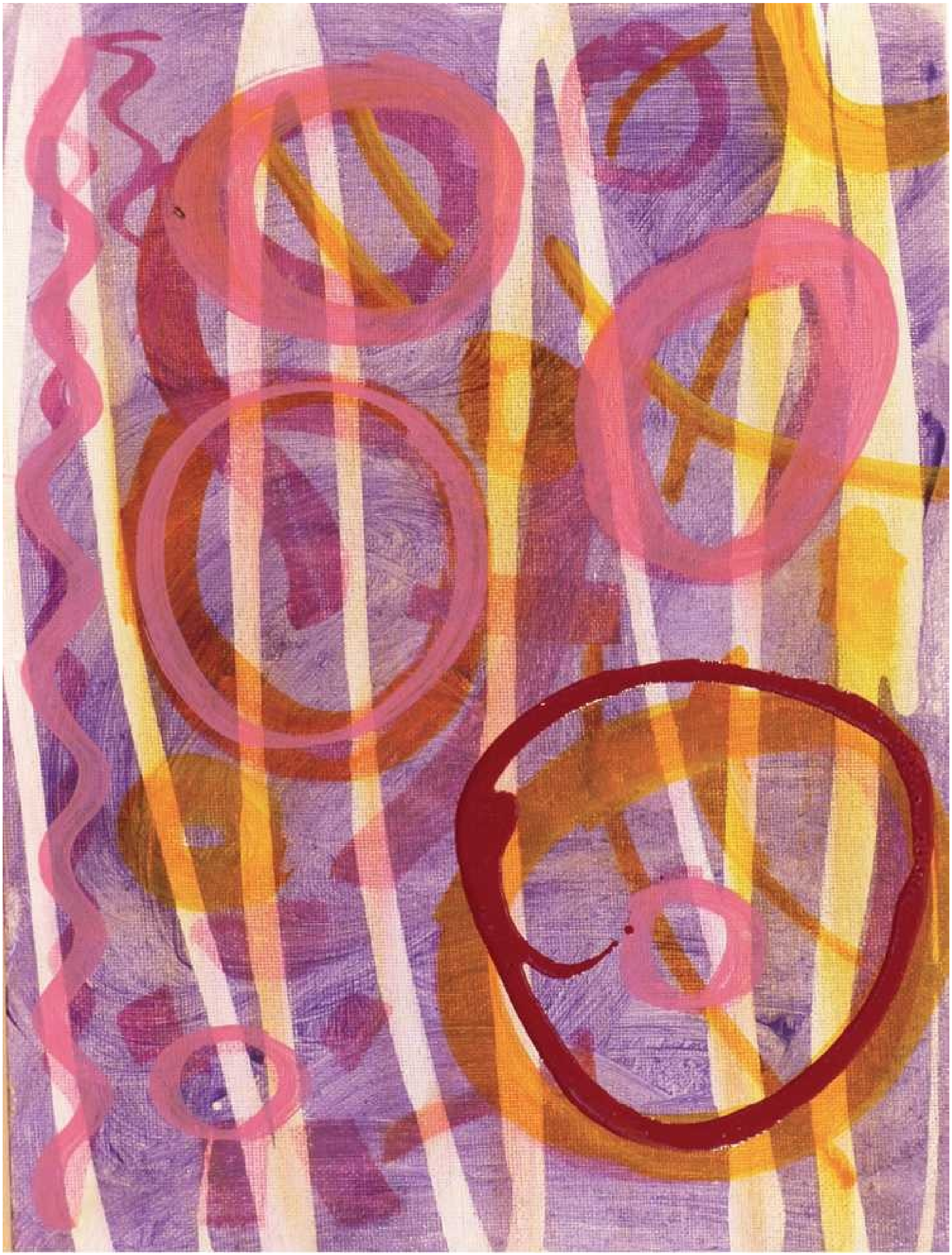
10. WHAT IF YOU DON’T HAVE ANYTHING TO PAINT ON?

Elise Marshall found herself on vacation in Aspen with no canvas and a minimal set of paints. So she painted on the Sunday paper. Using a bit of the paint she had with her, she collaged some paper onto the magazine section of the Sunday paper. Acrylic paint works like an adhesive just like gel medium. She painted on the paper using the minimal colors she had on hand. What a great idea!



11. WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IF YOU PRINTED YOUR PALETTE?

For this piece I simply placed a piece of clean white paper on top of my palette and pressed it down. I actually did quite a few of these that particular day. Once it dried, I came back with some oil pastel and made a couple of circles. I finished it off with a couple of circles made in Teal fluid right from the bottle.

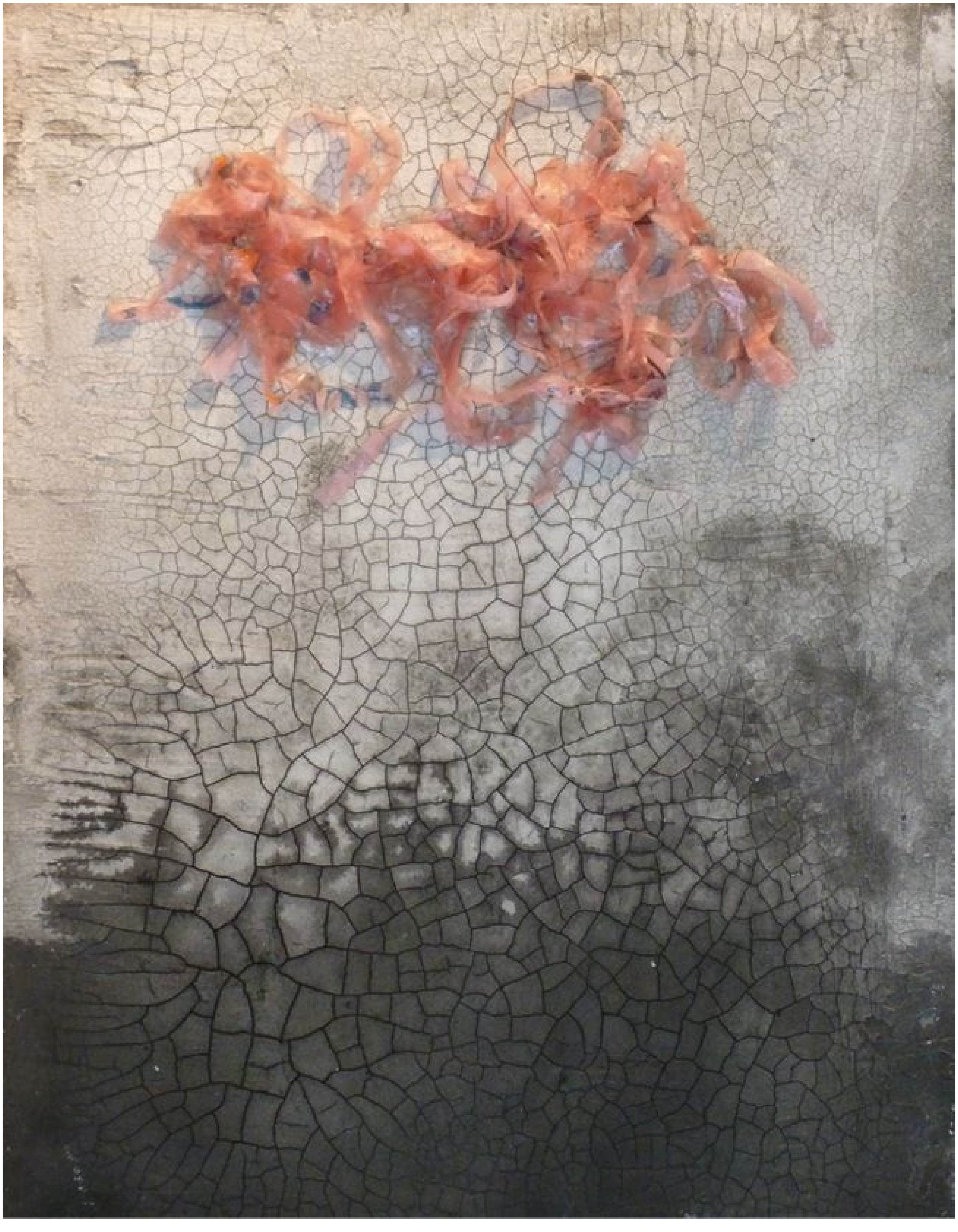


12. WHAT IF YOU USE ACRYLIC MARKERS?

I love some of the new markers that you can fill with acrylic paint. Just draw on the canvas! In this piece I first drew on the white canvas with pink and yellow acrylic markers and let them dry. Next I covered the canvas with a thin layer of Ultramarine Violet mixed with polymer medium in a ratio of 1:10. While that layer was wet, I laid down lines made with Acrylic Glazing Liquid using a bottle with a small tip, being careful not to let the tip of the bottle drag into the wet paint layer. I then dried the Ultramarine Violet layer quickly with a hair dryer. Then I wiped off the glazing liquid, leaving the white lines of the canvas showing through. The glazing liquid acts like a resist in the wet paint. I put a final circle of Quinadricone Magenta fluid on top.

For ten more inspiring “What-Ifs,” visit:

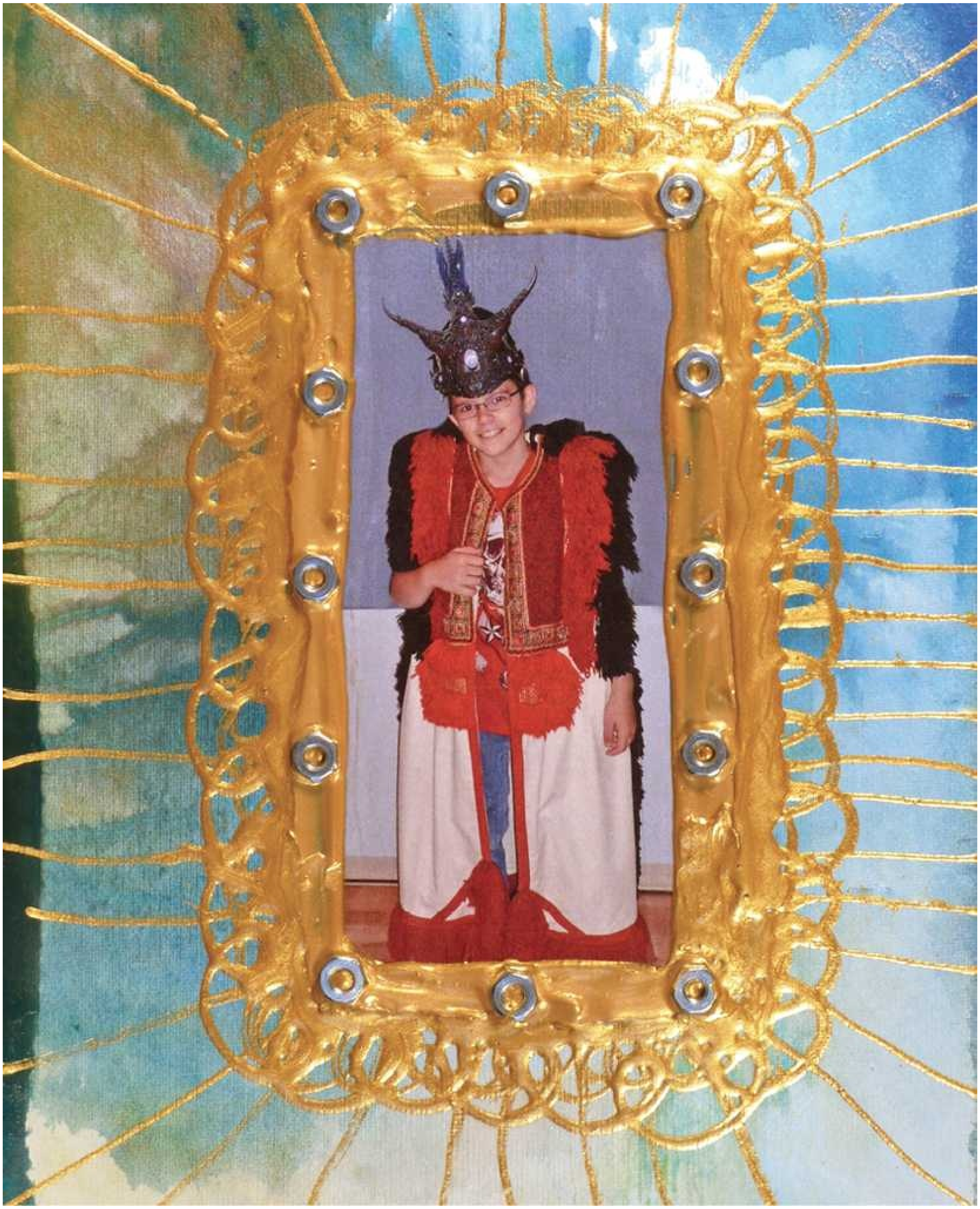
www.CreateMixedMedia.com/acrylicpaintingwithpassion.



13. WHAT IF YOU HAVE SOME GREAT PACKING MATERIAL

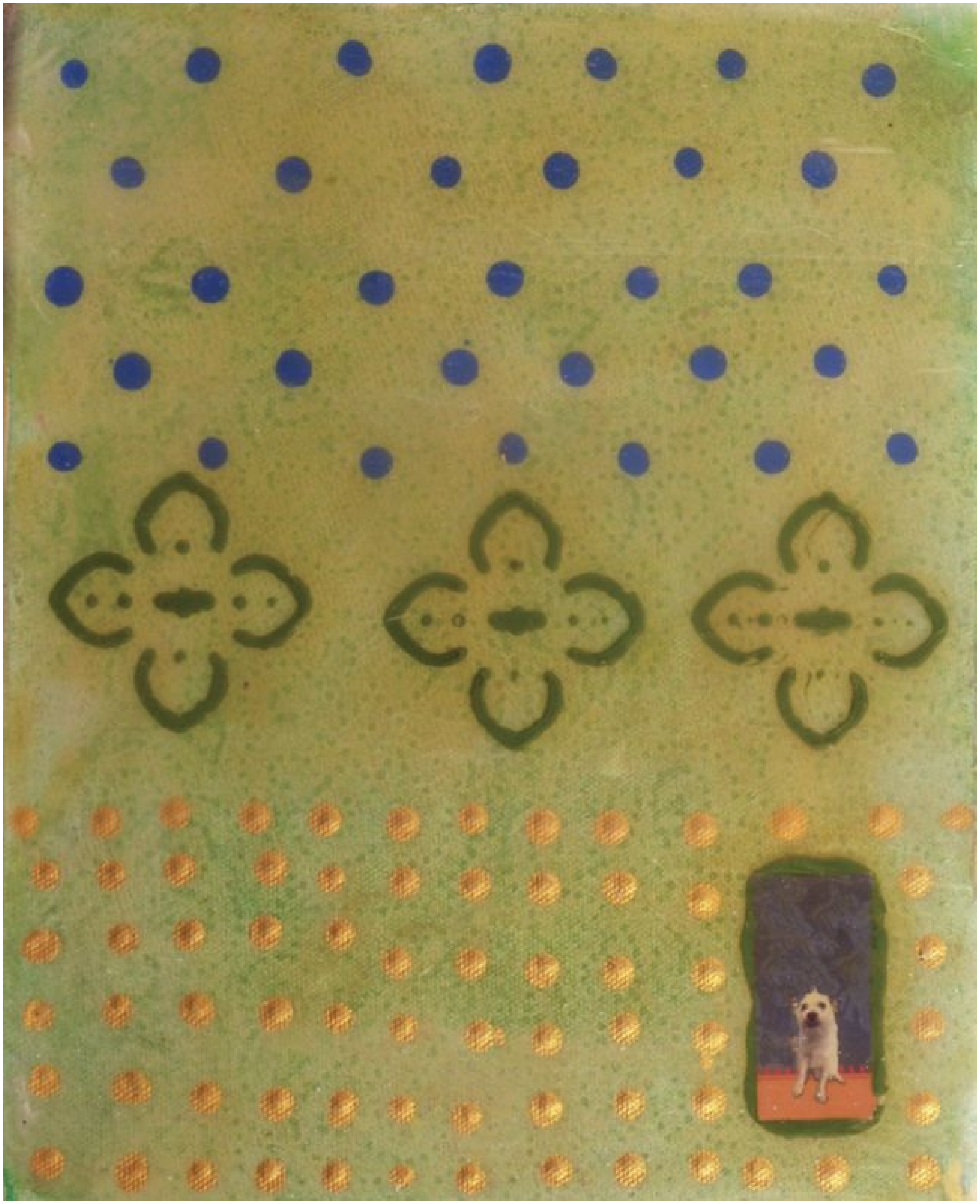
ON HAND?

I found this really cool pink shredded packing material downstairs in my studio building. I had prepped a board with Crackle Paste, but I didn’t know what to do with it. So I rubbed some Carbon Black fluid into the dried Crackle Paste (follow the directions on the jar for Crackle Paste and prep at least 24–48 hours before you plan to use it). I let the Carbon Black dry. Then I dipped the packing material into a jar of gloss medium. I made sure to get it thoroughly soaked with polymer medium. Then I laid it down on top of the Crackle Paste board and let it dry overnight.



14. WHAT IF YOU TURN YOUR GRANDSON INTO A MACEDONIAN WARLORD?

When we visited the natural history museum, my grandson, Wolfgang, tried on this costume. I couldn’t resist turning it into art. I found an image of a warlord’s helmet and collaged it onto the photo of Wolfgang. I painted the background with a washy mixture of Phthalo Blue and Green Gold mixed with water (since this is on paper). Once that dried I collaged the picture of Wolfgang with his helmet. I used Iridescent Gold fluid in a hair dye bottle to make thin gold lines radiating out from the picture. Finally I mixed Iridescent Gold fluid with gloss gel and surrounded the picture with it. As a final touch, I placed bolts from the hardware store into the wet gloss gel and let everything dry overnight.



15. WHAT IF YOU PAY HOMAGE TO YOUR BELOVED PET?

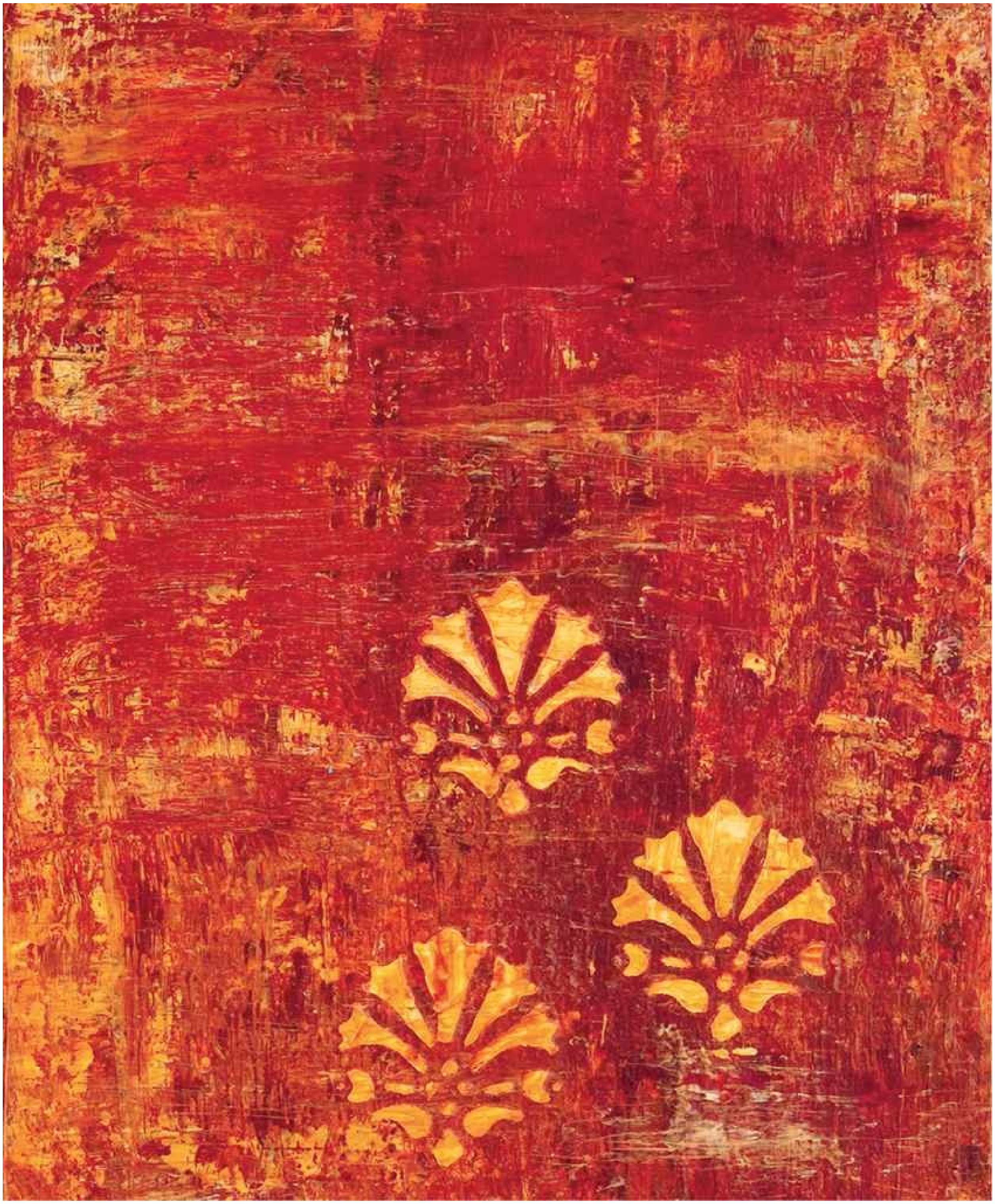
I used Green Gold for the background, had fun with Phthalo Blue fluid dots and Iridescent Gold fluid dots. (Hint: Make dots with a cotton swab. Cut off the fuzzy end and use the hard stick part. It makes perfect dots!) After the dots dried I made stencils with Green Gold Heavy Body Acrylic. I glued down a picture of a friend’s dog (my dog was busy that day). After all the dots and stencils dried, I covered the entire canvas with a layer of matte gel mixed with a tiny bit of Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold for a faux encaustic look. All matte gels dry to a very waxy finish.

EXPLORATION SIX

Limiting Color

Color is powerful. Thousands of books have been written on the subject. Songs, even plays, have been written about color. I’ve thought about color a lot over my career as an artist, and I have come to the conclusion that, to paraphrase a well-known adage, “Less is *usually* more.” So as I said in Exploration One, use three colors when you think you need four, but use them well. Throughout this book I’ve been giving you ways to access your creativity easily—to just do it! And this holds true for color as well. In this chapter let’s use less color, but do more with it.

“With color one obtains an energy that seems to stem from witchcraft.” —Henri Matisse



This painting was created with just three colors: Quinacridone Burnt Orange, Quinacridone/Nickel Azo Gold and Titan Buff. By layering these colors in different intensities I was able to get a good range of color.

TRANSENNA III

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 14" × 18" (46cm × 36cm)

Discretionary Color Mixing

What can you do with just one color and black and white? A lot! We’re going to practice what I like to call “discretionary color mixing.” This will give you a lot of control over color and make it simple.

One of the big problems when mixing color is what I call the “plop-plop” method. This goes something like: Take a glob of this color and a glob of that color, stir it up and hope for the best. This kind of color mixing lacks control and finesse.

Discretionary color mixing, on the other hand, gives you a lot of control because you shift the color in tiny increments. You have to be patient but the payoff is big—more control and less wasted paint from making big muddy mixtures.

What You Need

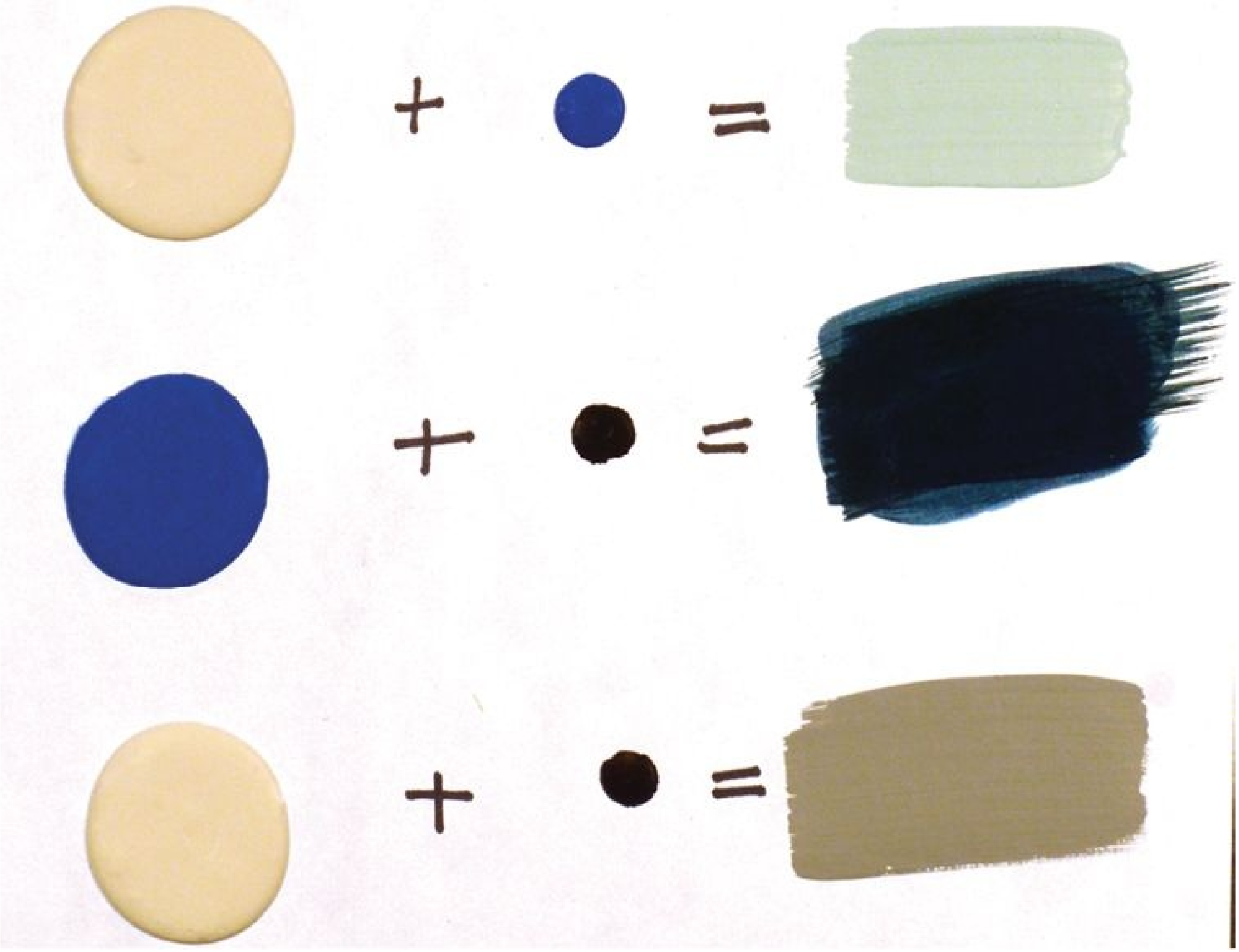
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
canvas, watercolor paper or canvas board
Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Titan Buff
- Carbon Black
- Historical Manganese Blue Hue

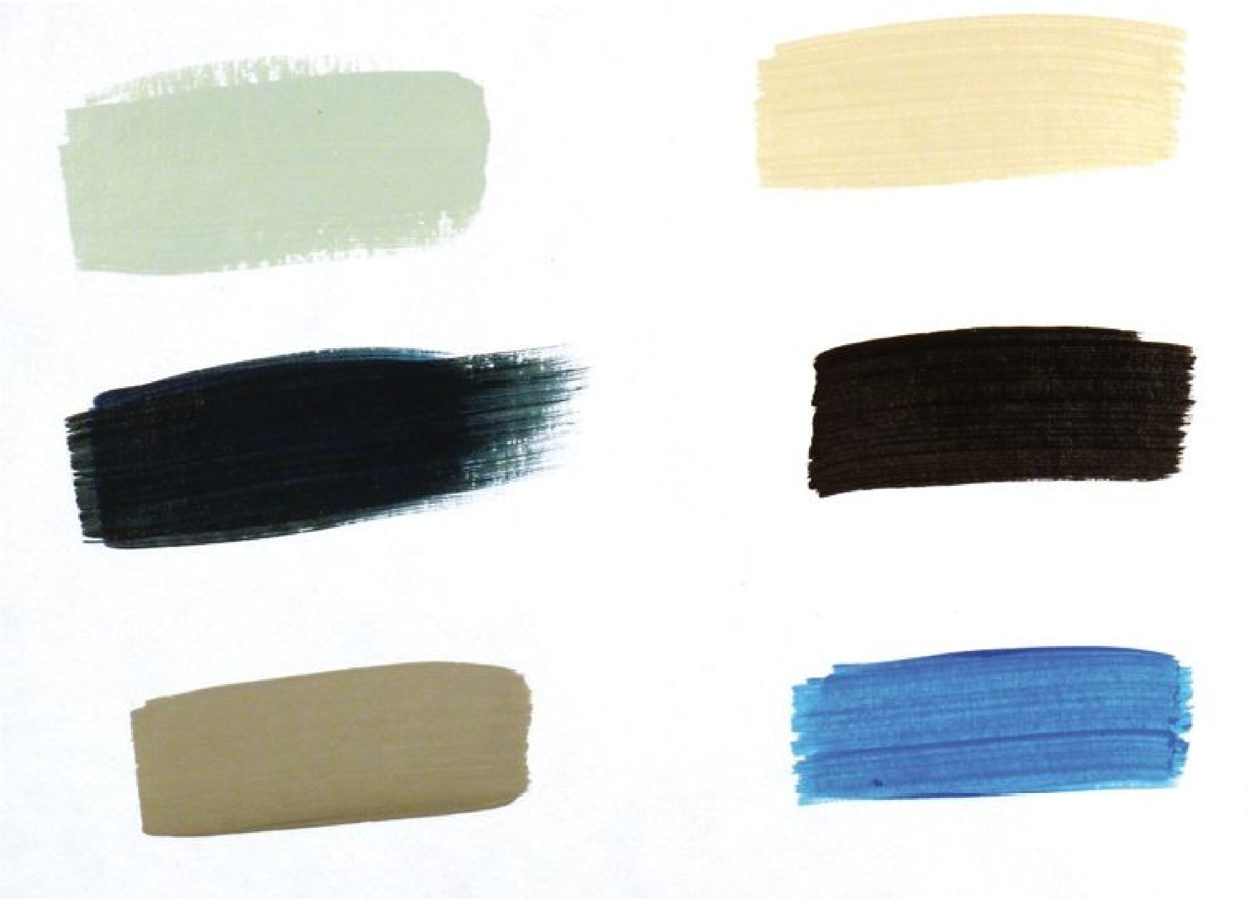
no. 8 flat brush, nylon or Taklon
no. 10 round brush nylon or Taklon
commercial stencil
Catalyst Blade (optional)
water container
paper towels
palette

VERSION ONE: MANGANESE BLUE

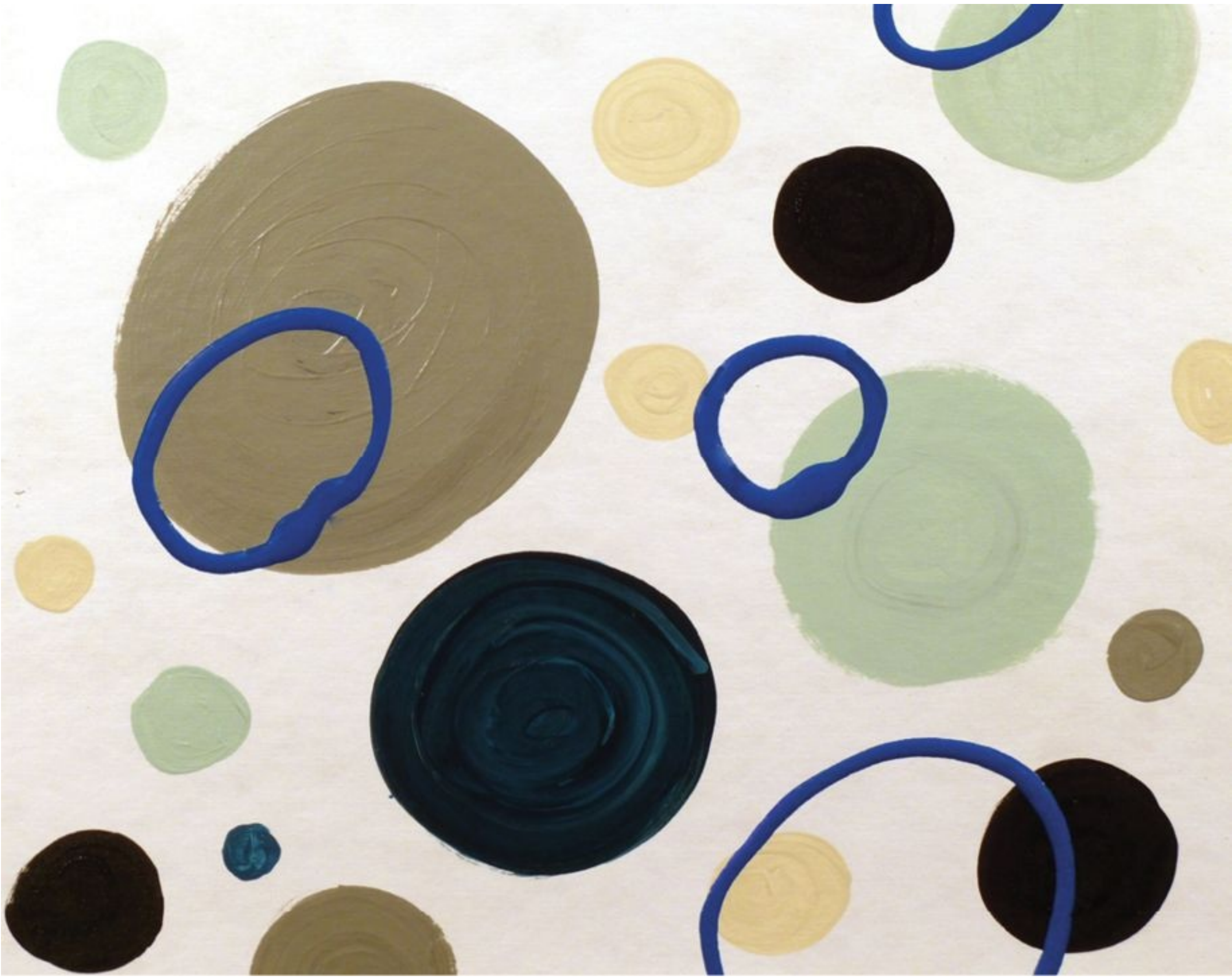
I love the historical colors that Golden makes. They offer acrylic painters the ability to work with colors that are rich in tradition. Of course, choose another color if you like, just remember to change the color in very small steps.



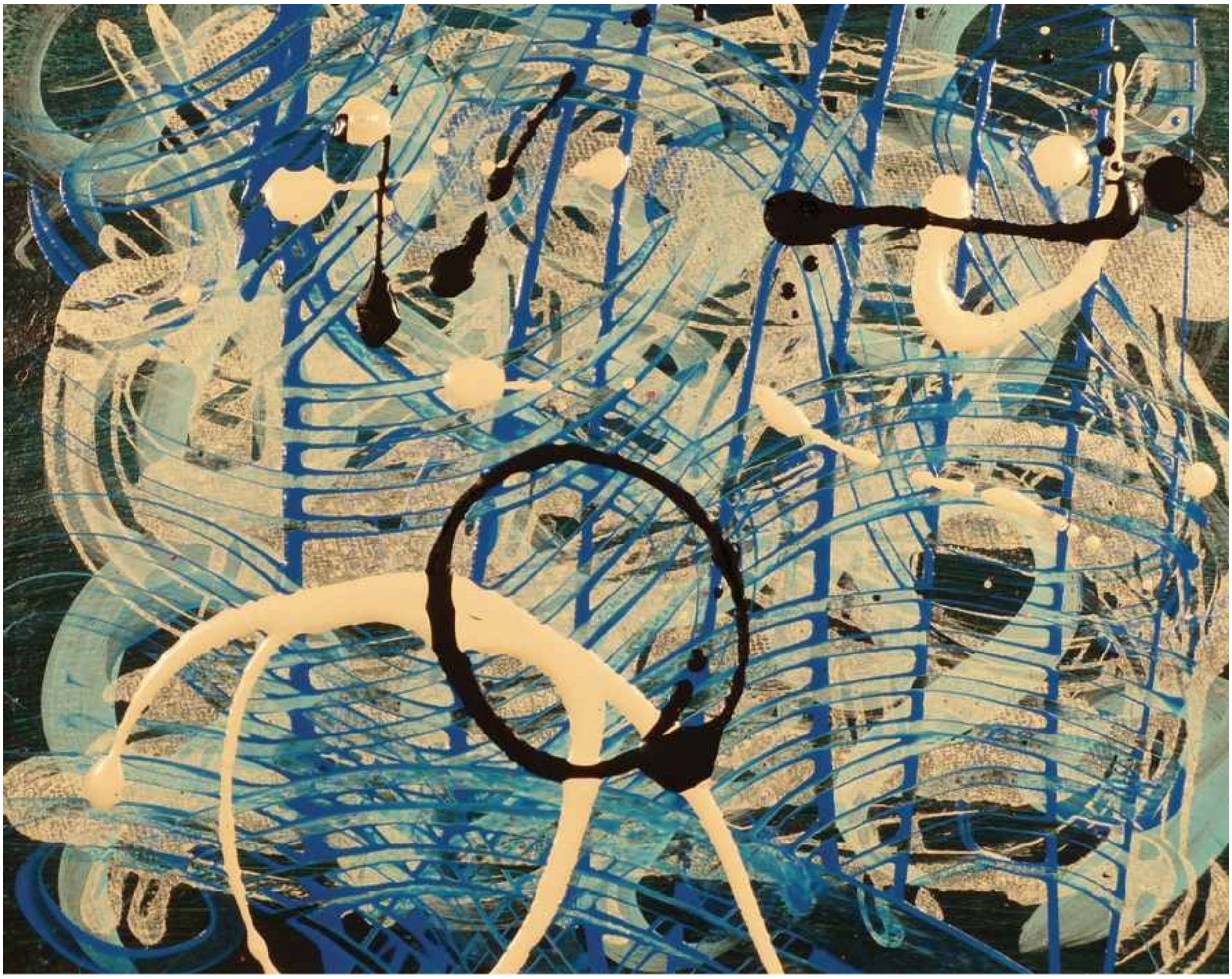
STEP 1 Take ten parts Titan Buff and add one part Historical Manganese Blue Hue to make a pale blue. Titan Buff is warmer than Titanium White, so the tint that we are making is warmer. Add one part Carbon Black to ten parts Historical Manganese Blue Hue to make a dark bluish gray. Finally, add one part Carbon Black to ten parts Titan Buff to make a warm gray.



STEP 2 Let’s see what we have so far. These are now the colors we have available to use: Carbon Black, Titan Buff and Historical Manganese Blue Hue full-strength; and three mixtures—one pale blue, one gray-blue and one dark gray-blue. We have six colors to start with. (You could make many more mixtures but this will get us started.)

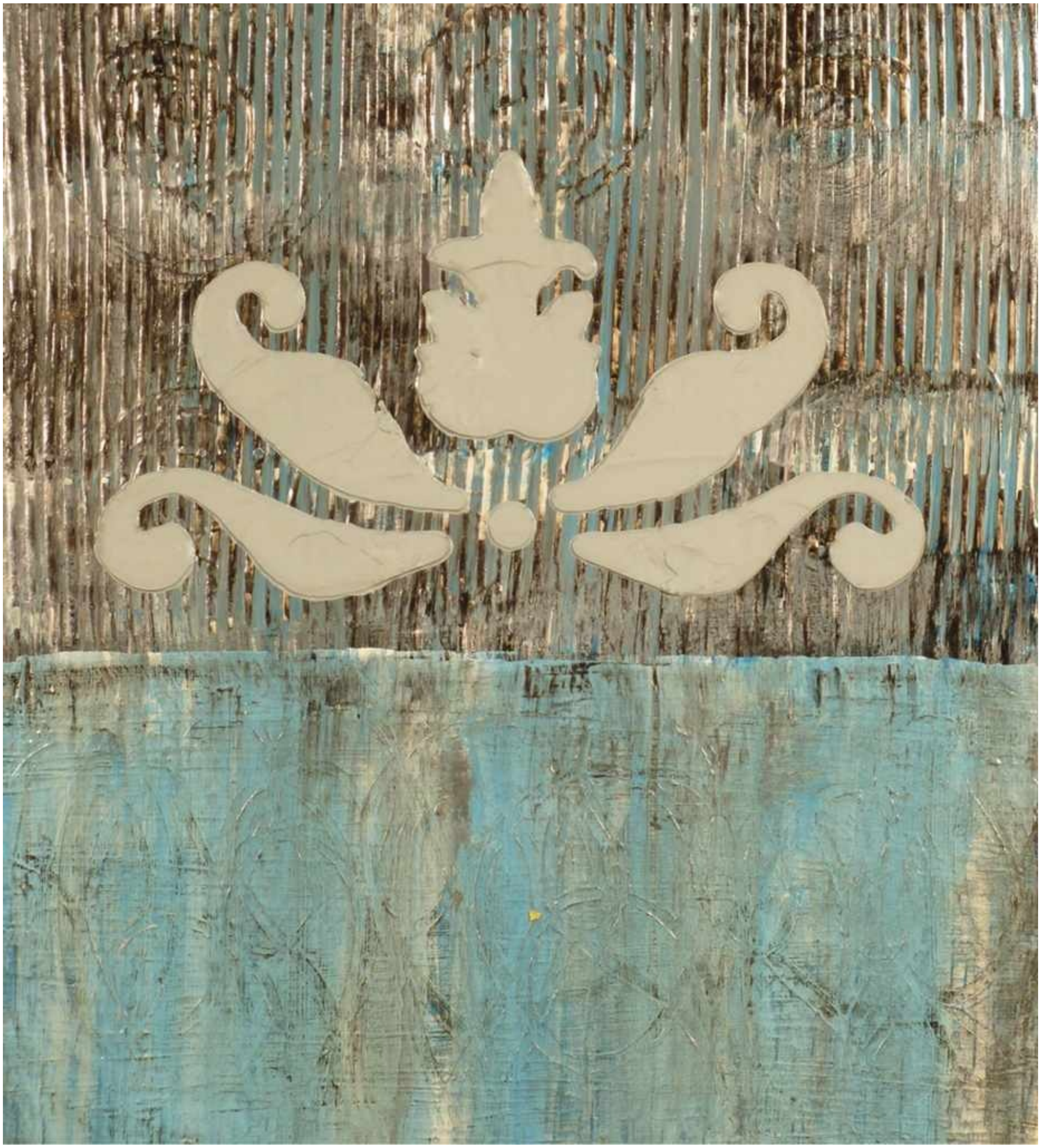


STEP 3 Using one basic shape from Exploration Three, paint a simple abstract using all six colors.

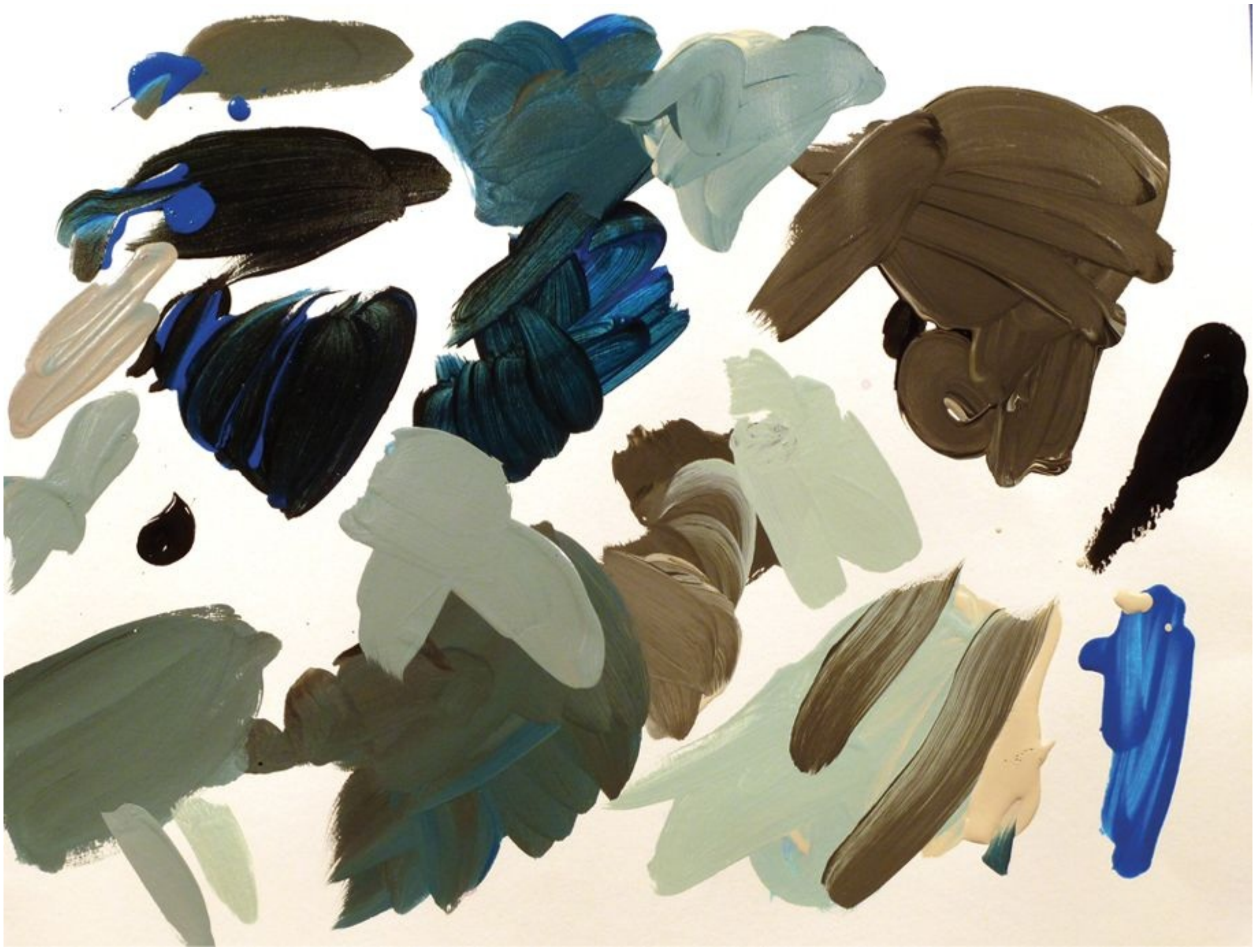


In this piece I painted the background dark blue-gray by mixing Historical Manganese Blue Hue with Carbon Black. Then I dripped Titan Buff fluid right from the bottle. I drizzled Historical Manganese Blue Hue and dragged a Catalyst Blade through it (see step 6 in the following version with Carbon Black). Finally, I dripped Carbon Black and Titan Buff fluids for the circles.

Can you see how this could lead to an entire series exploring just these three colors?



In this small painting I again used only the three colors, Titan Buff, Historical Manganese Blue Hue and Carbon Black. I added a stenciled shape for contrast. When painting the background, I laid down first one color, then without waiting for it to dry, immediately laid down the second color. This creates a wide variety *of tints, mutes and shades of color. I also used the Catalyst Blade in the wet paint to create texture.*



Here’s my mixing palette page for these projects. You can see the wide range of colors created with just three mixing colors.

VERSION TWO: QUINACRIDONE MAGENTA

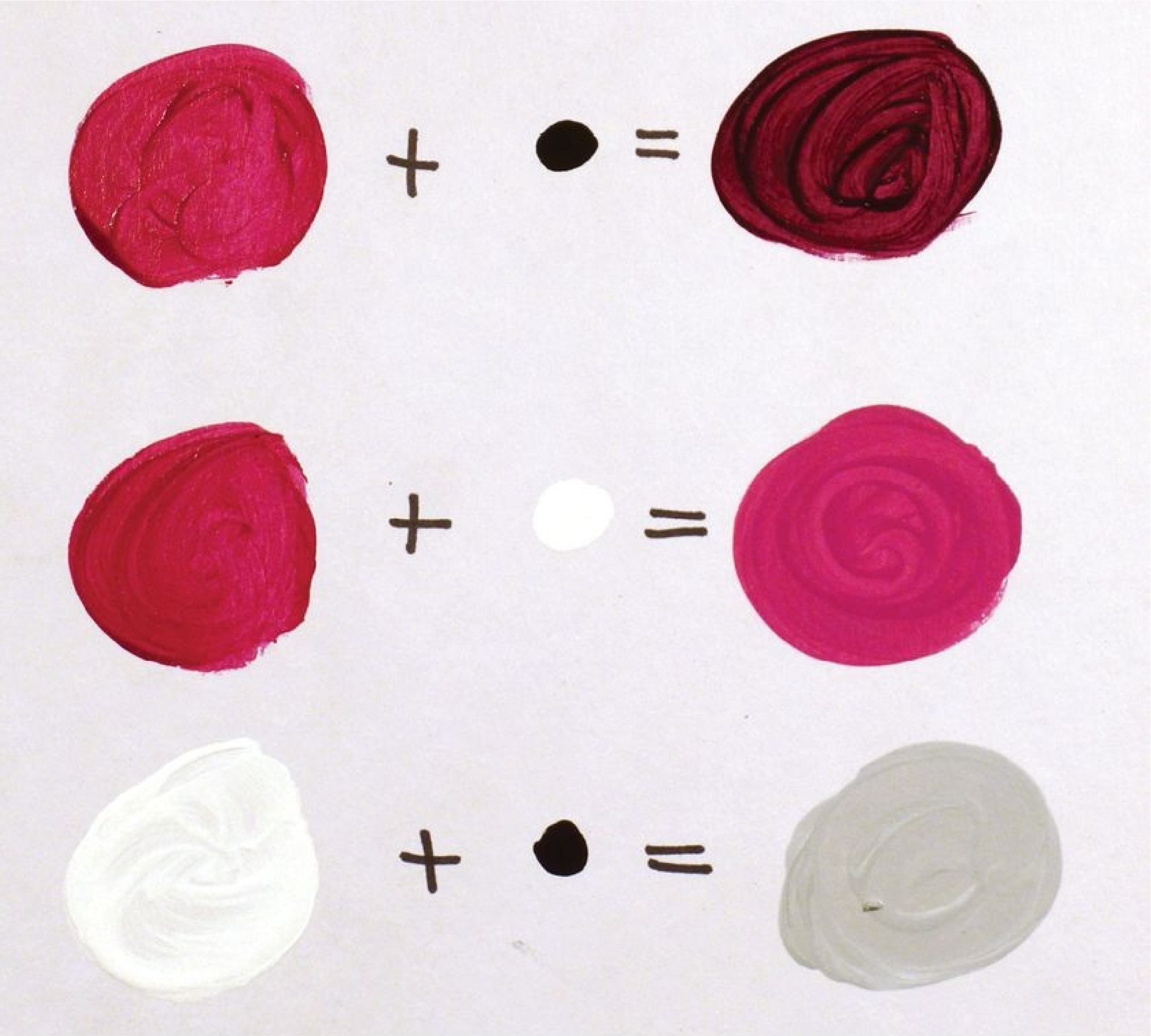
Try this with other combinations of colors. The best mixtures are ones that use a vibrant color like the Historical Manganese Blue Hue used previously, a dark color like Carbon Black and a color with a lighter value like Titanium White, Titan Buff or Naples Yellow.

What You Need

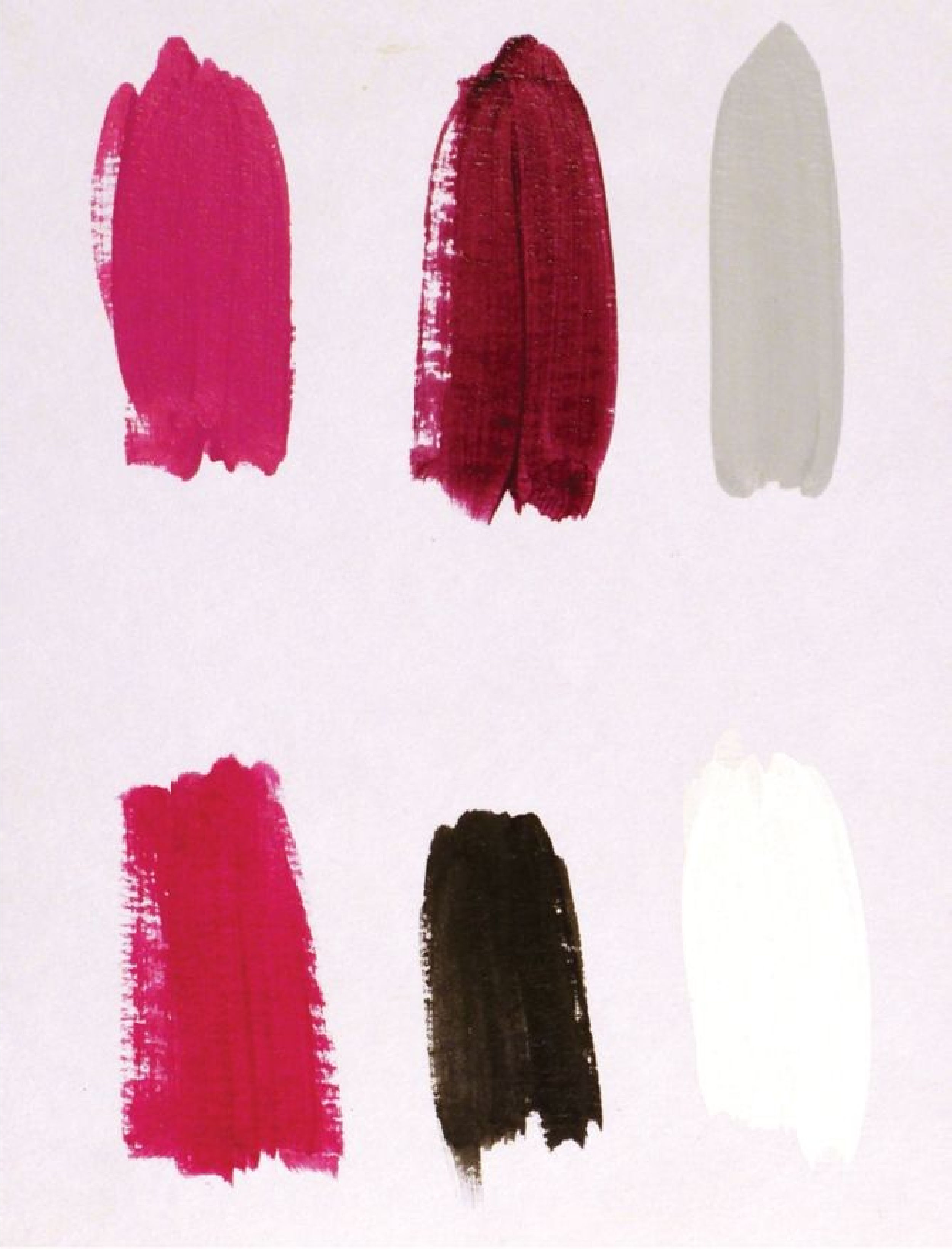
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
assorted brushes
canvas, watercolor paper or canvas board
Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Titanium White
- Carbon Black
- Quinacridone Magenta

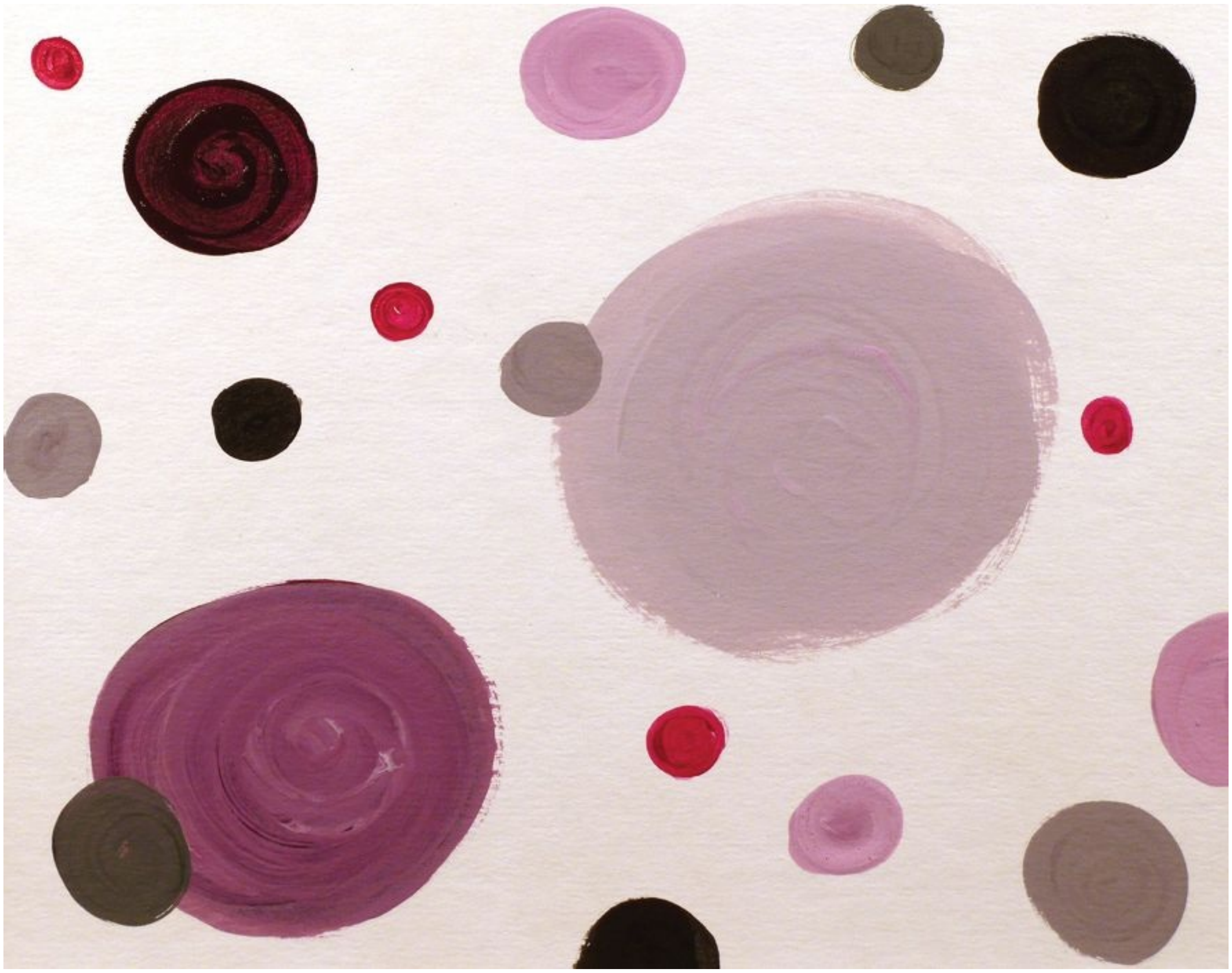
Catalyst Blade (optional)
water container
paper towels
palette



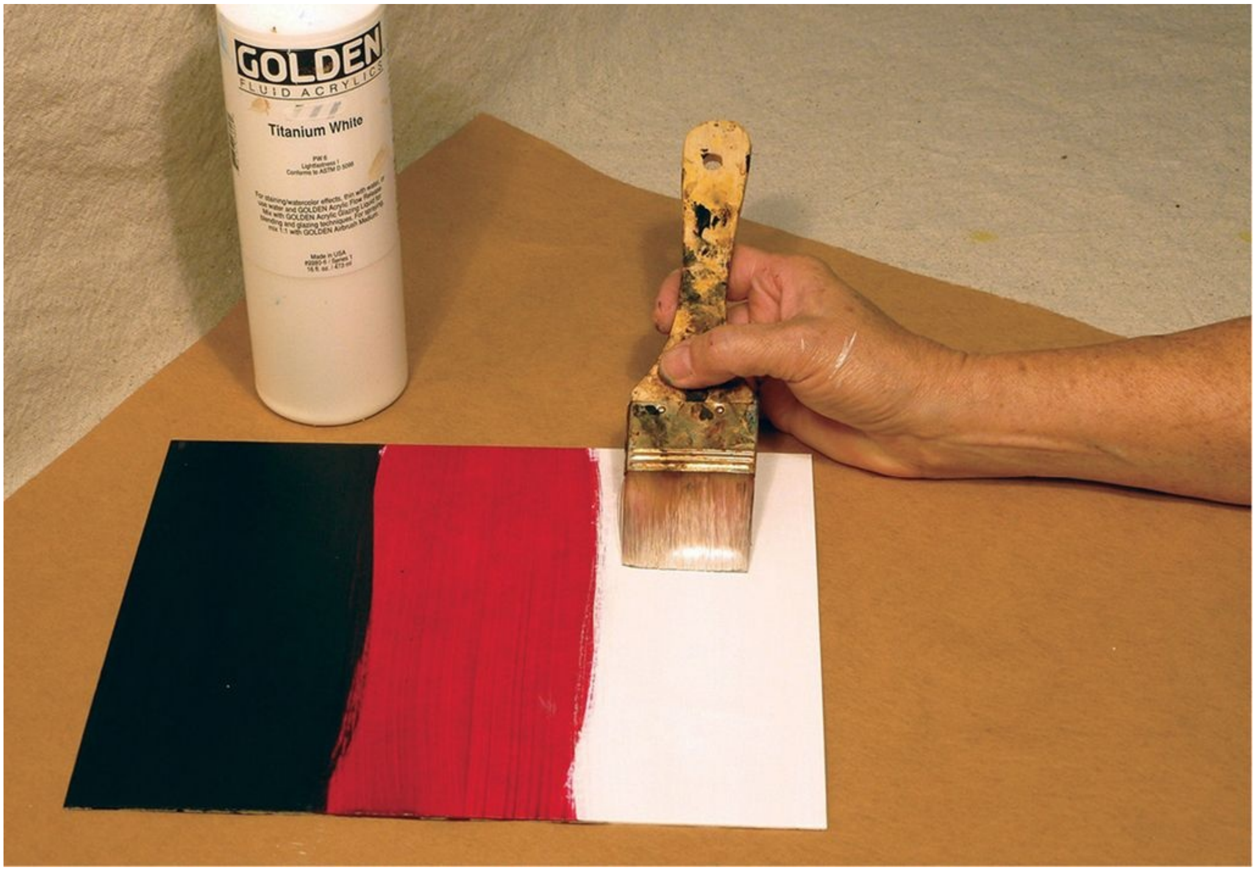
STEP 1 Mix a tiny bit of Carbon Black with Quinacridone Magenta to make a dark purplish brown. Next mix a tiny bit of Titanium White with Quinacridone Magenta to lighten it slightly and opacify it. Finally, add one part Carbon Black to ten parts Titanium White to make a neutral gray.



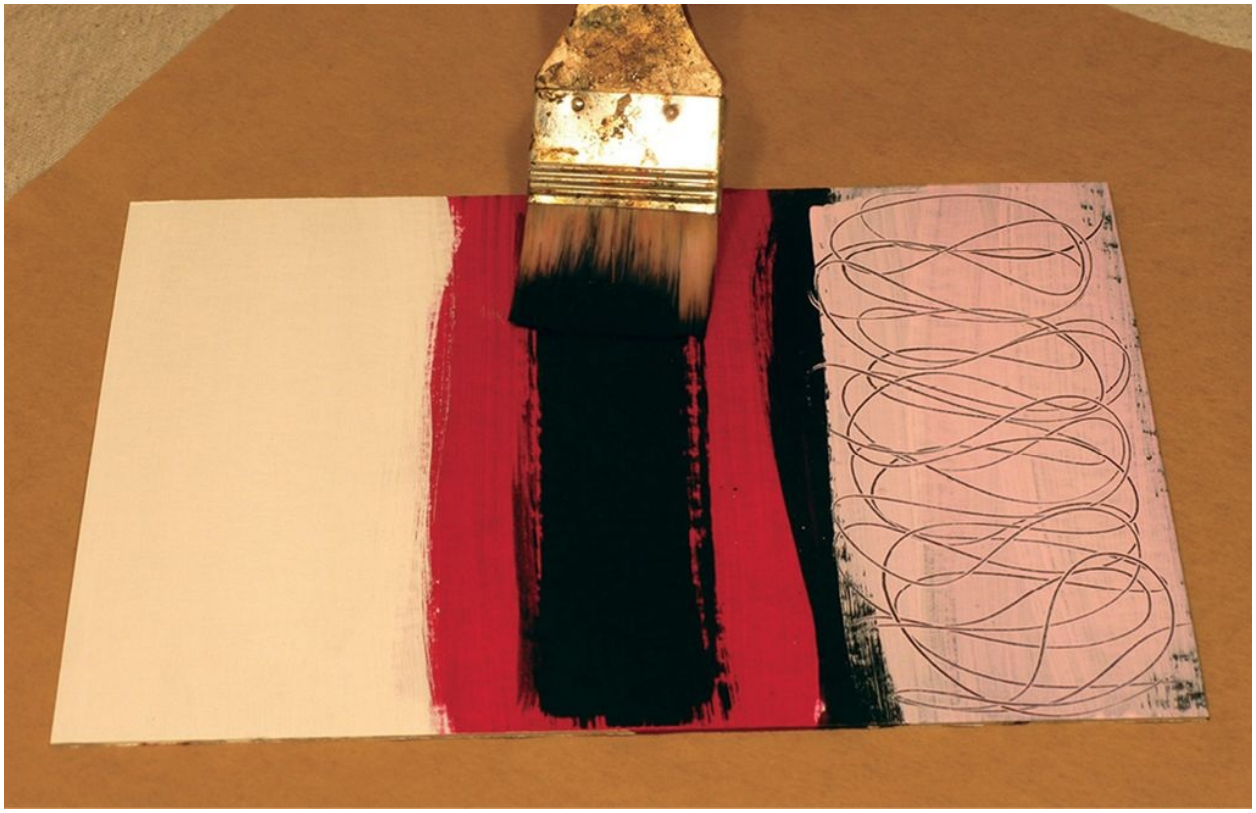
STEP 2 Here are the six mixtures using Quinacridone Magenta, Carbon Black and Titanium White.



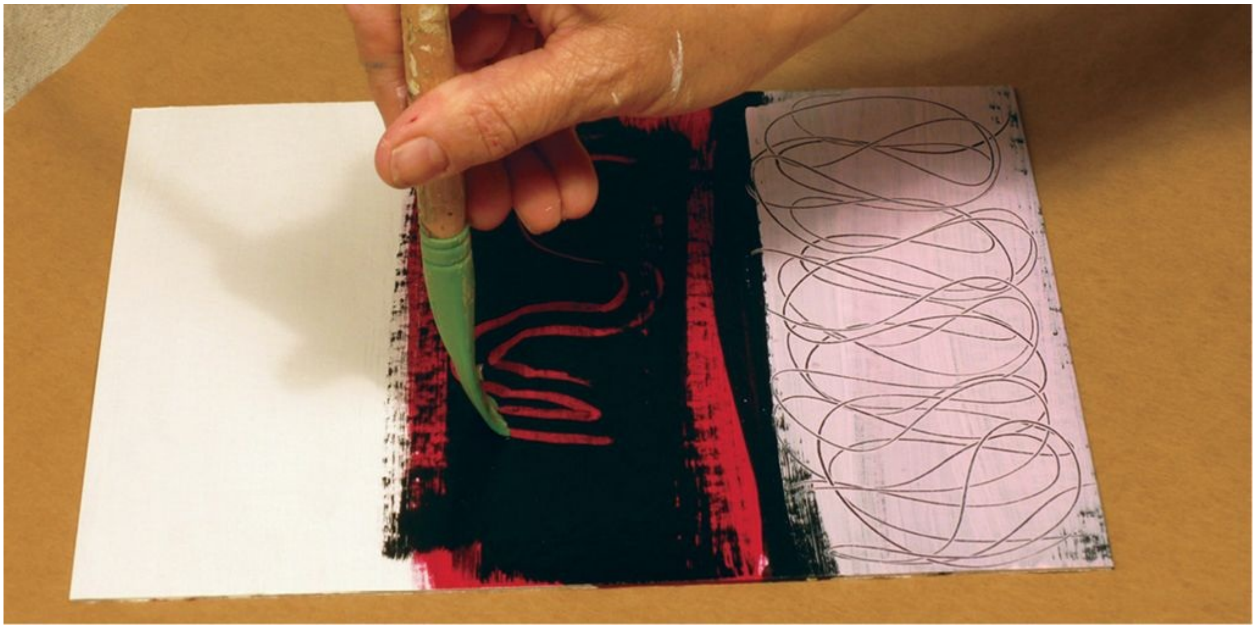
STEP 3 Using simple circles, paint an abstract using those six colors.



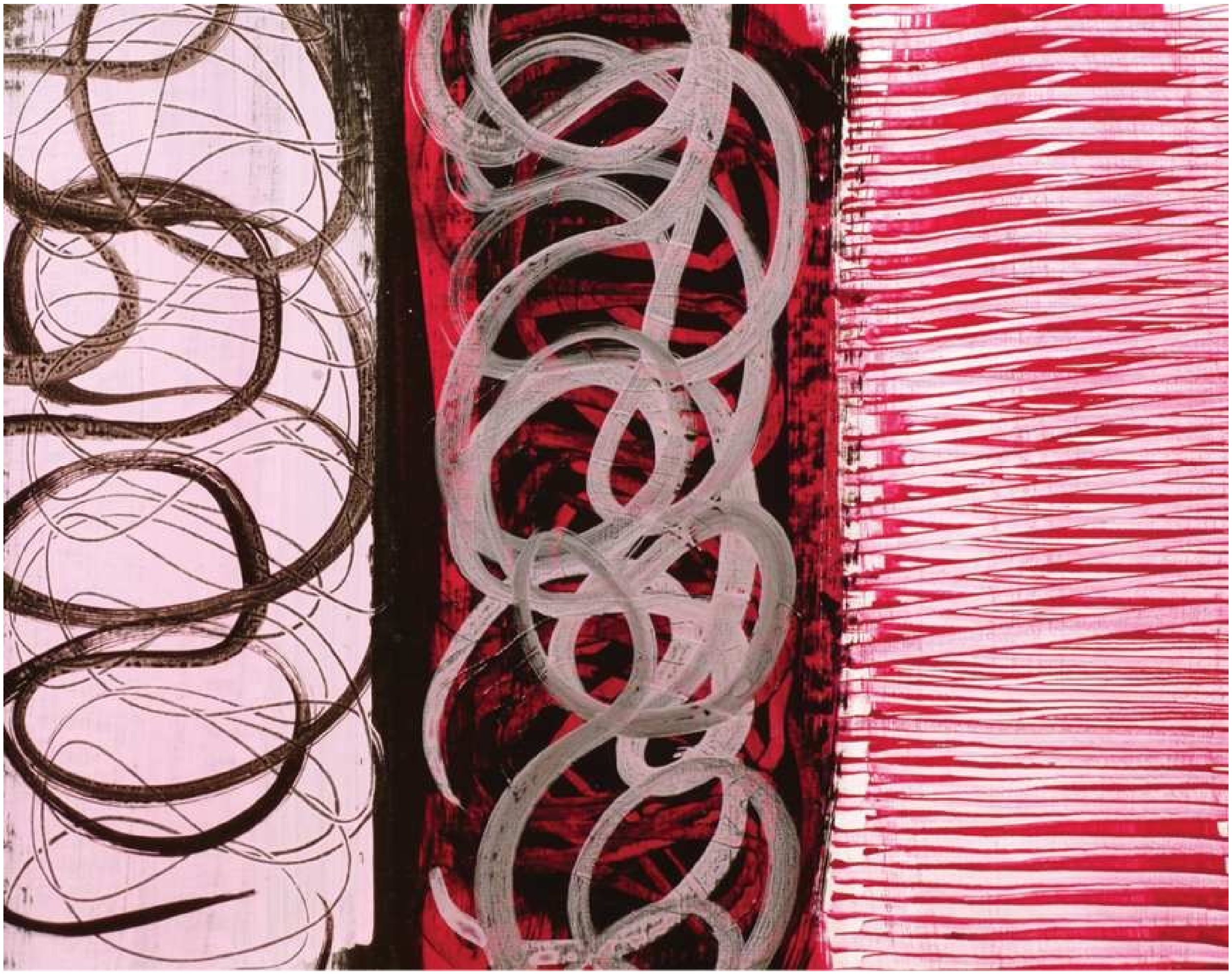
STEP 4 For this example, paint a wide stripe of each color on another surface. Don’t worry if the edges bleed into one another. Let it dry.



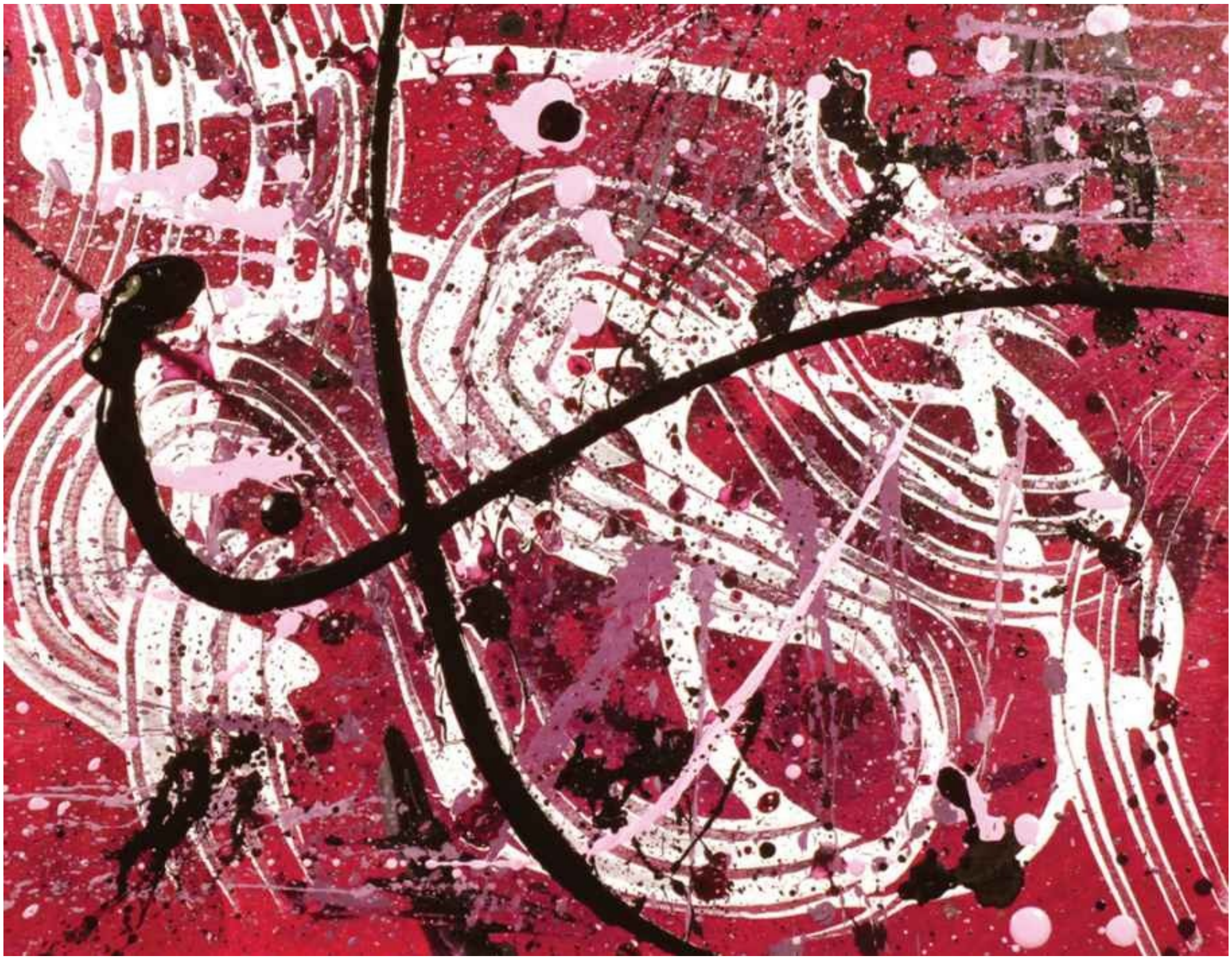
STEP 5 Paint a layer of Carbon Black fluid on top of the Quinacridone Magenta stripe.



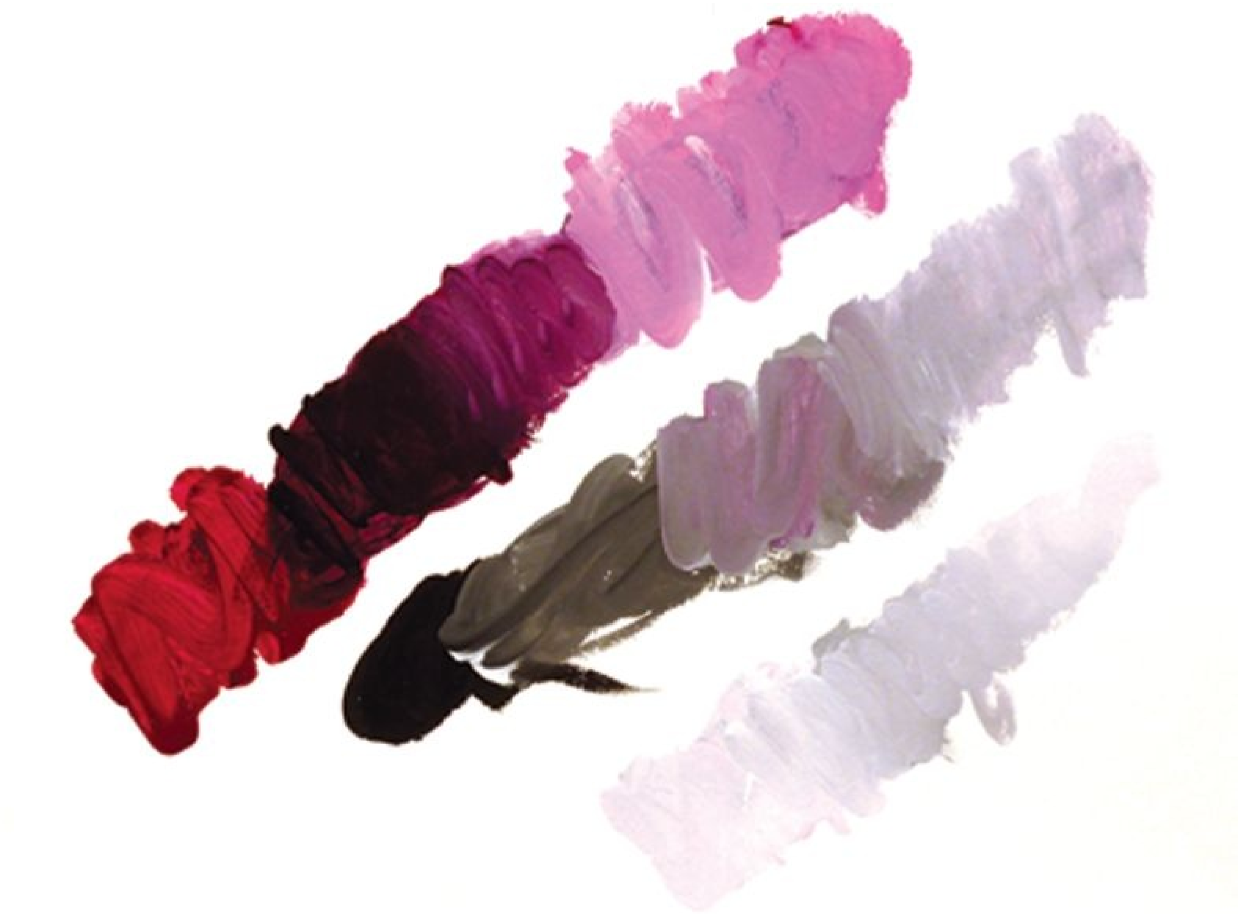
STEP 6 While the Carbon Black is still wet, carve into it with the Catalyst blade, a screwdriver or other mark-making tool. The contrasting color will show through from beneath. This works best with colors that have high contrast, e.g., dark over light, brilliant over dull.



STEP 7 Finish the painting with layers of contrasting color all made from only three colors: Quinacridone Magenta, Carbon Black and Titanium White.



In this abstract I started by painting the background with straight Quinacridone Magenta, being sure to let a little of the white board show through. I let that dry and then poured pure Titanium White fluid down and dragged the Catalyst Blade through it. I let that dry and mixed up several different mixtures of varying shades and tints using Quinacridone Magenta, Titanium White and Carbon Black. I dripped these mixtures over the dry Titanium White. Finally I dripped Carbon Black over the top.



Mixing sample colors for these projects.

FOR A THIRD EXAMPLE OF COLOR MIXING VISIT:

www.createmixedmedia.com/acrylicpaintingwithpassion

COLOR TERMINOLOGY

Primary colors– red, yellow, blue. These colors cannot be created from any other color.
Secondary colors – orange, green, purple. These colors are created by mixing two primary colors.
Analogous colors – next to each other on the color wheel; e.g., orange and red are analogous.
Complementary colors – across from each other on the color wheel; e.g., red and green are complements.
Hue – the name of the color. Red is a hue.
Tint – color mixed with white.

Shade – color mixed with black.

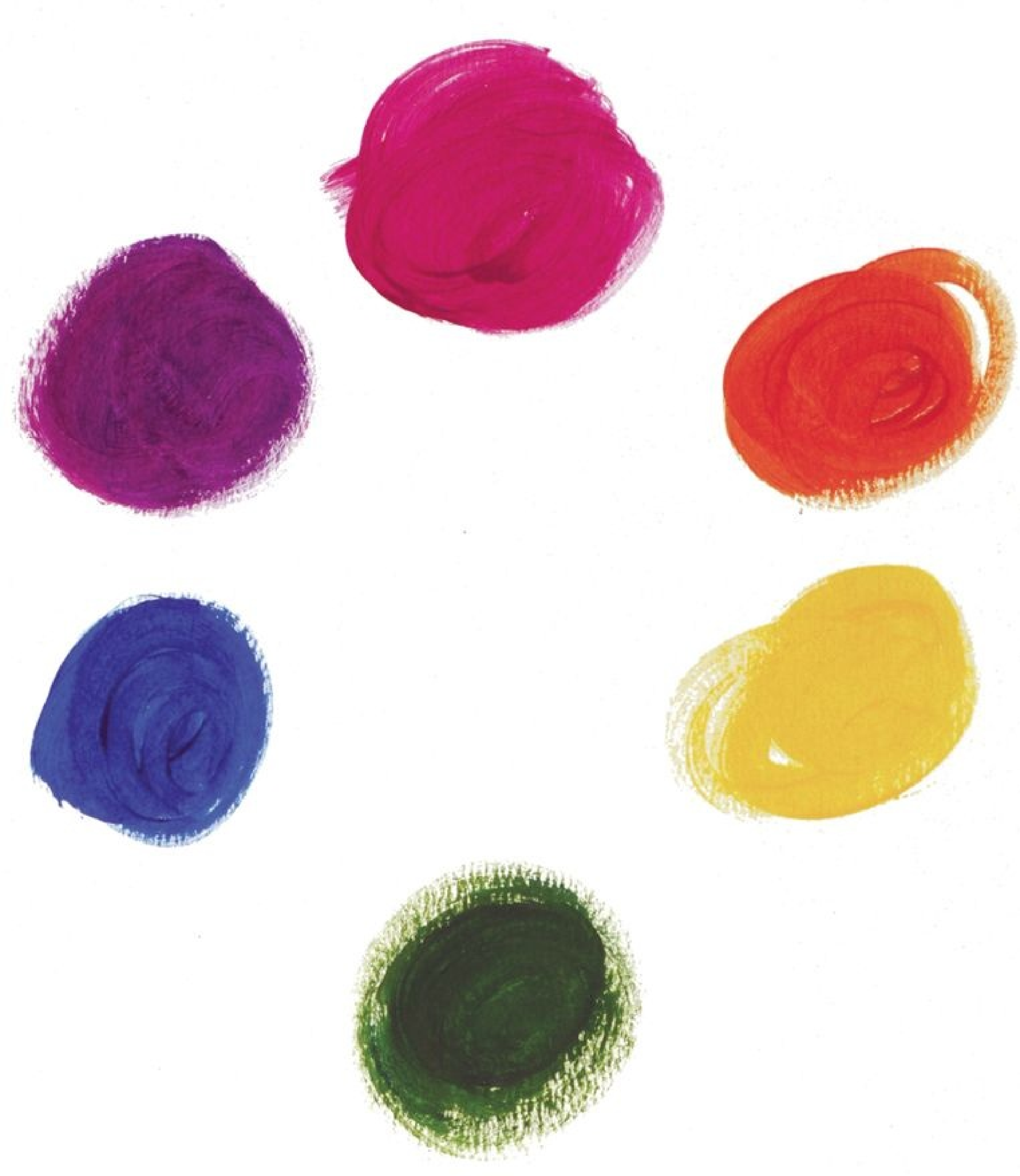
Value – the relative lightness or darkness of a color. Hansa Yellow Medium is light in value. Burnt Umber is dark in value.

Muted color – color mixed with its complement.

Modern pigments – organic pigments created in a laboratory within the last fifty years. Typically these pigments are very intense and vibrant and make clean mixtures when mixed together.

Mineral pigments – inorganic pigments created using natural materials and ores. These pigments tend to make muddy mixtures and are less intense and vibrant than modern pigments.

Don’t be afraid to play with color, but keep it simple. Take your favorite color and see how far you can stretch it with just the addition of white and black. The control you gain over color will amaze you!



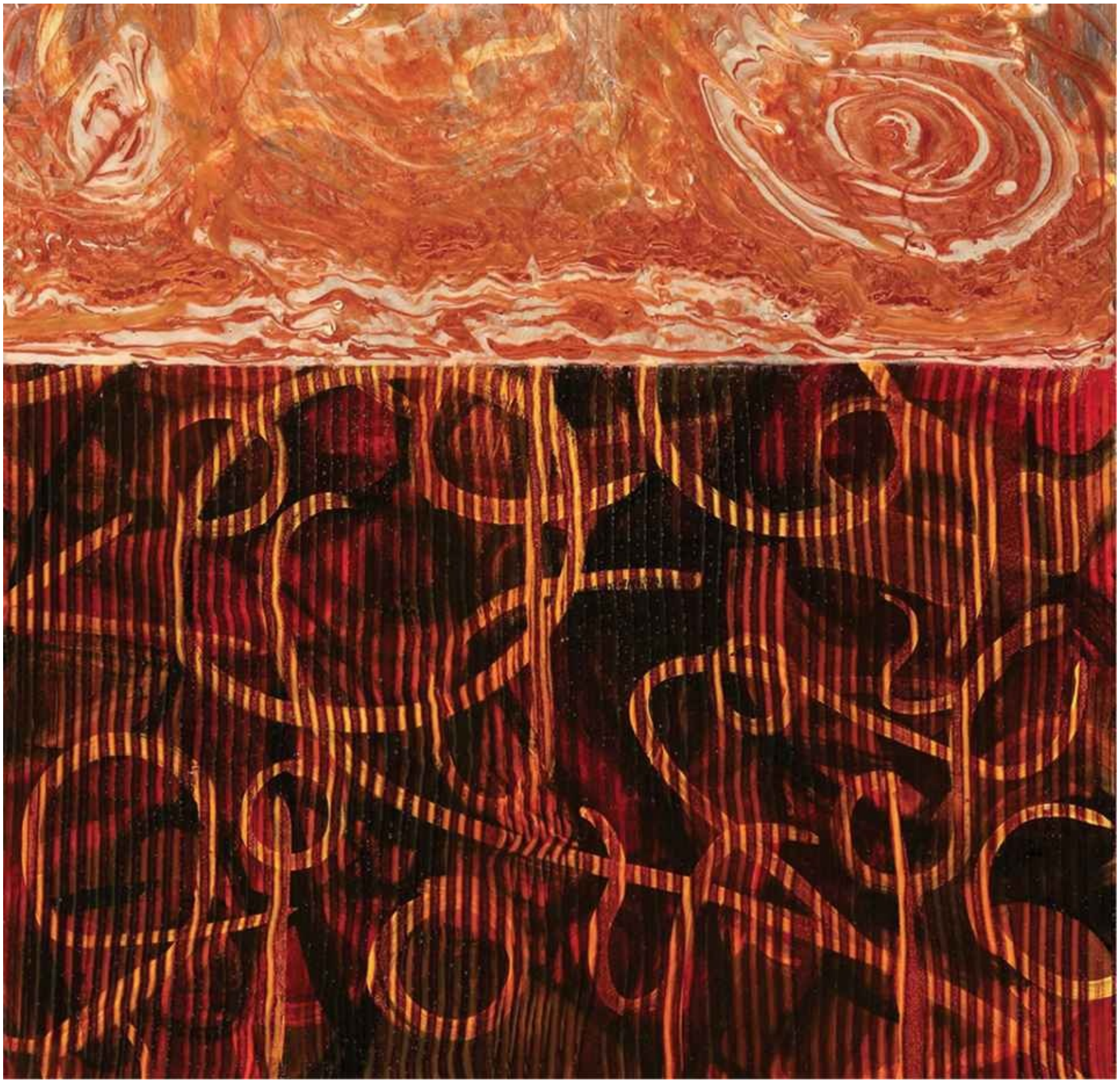
As a reference for Color Terminology, here’s our color wheel again from Tools of the Trade.

EXPLORATION SEVEN

Working With Words

Sometimes just figuring out what to paint is the hard part. We’ve all struggled when faced with the blank canvas. What shall I paint? I’d like to suggest you just start writing words, in paint, on the canvas. This is so simple and yet so powerful. I’ve been writing on my canvases for years, embedding words into the paint under so many layers that they are unintelligible. But I have a theory that the words themselves have an energy and invest the painting with a particular feeling, maybe even a little magic.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” —Lao-Tzu



AUTUMN JOY

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 18" × 18" (46cm × 46cm)

Words as a Design Element

When beginning this process, try not to think too hard about which words to paint. That said, if the word you write has special meaning for you—your child's name, a favorite vacation spot, a snippet of a favorite poem—then you will have a deep connection with the painting as well.

What You Need

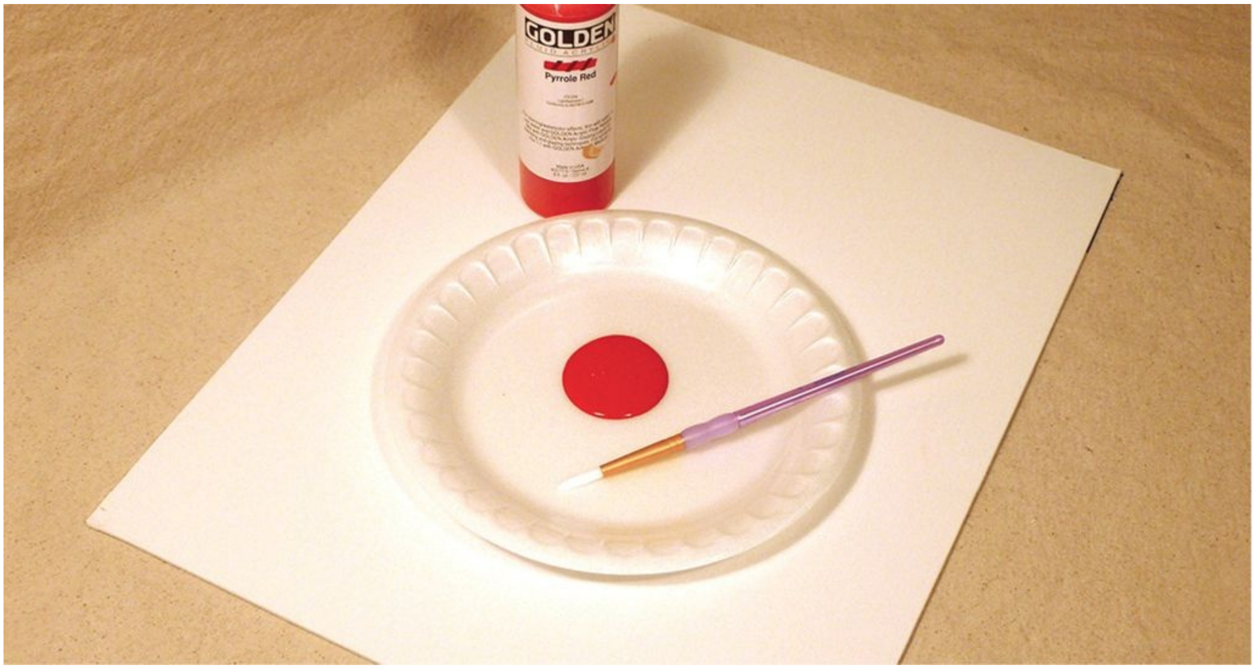
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 30–60 minutes
18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm) canvas or canvas board Assorted brushes
Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Pyrrole Red
- Green Gold
- Carbon Black
- Quinacridone Magenta
- Titanium White

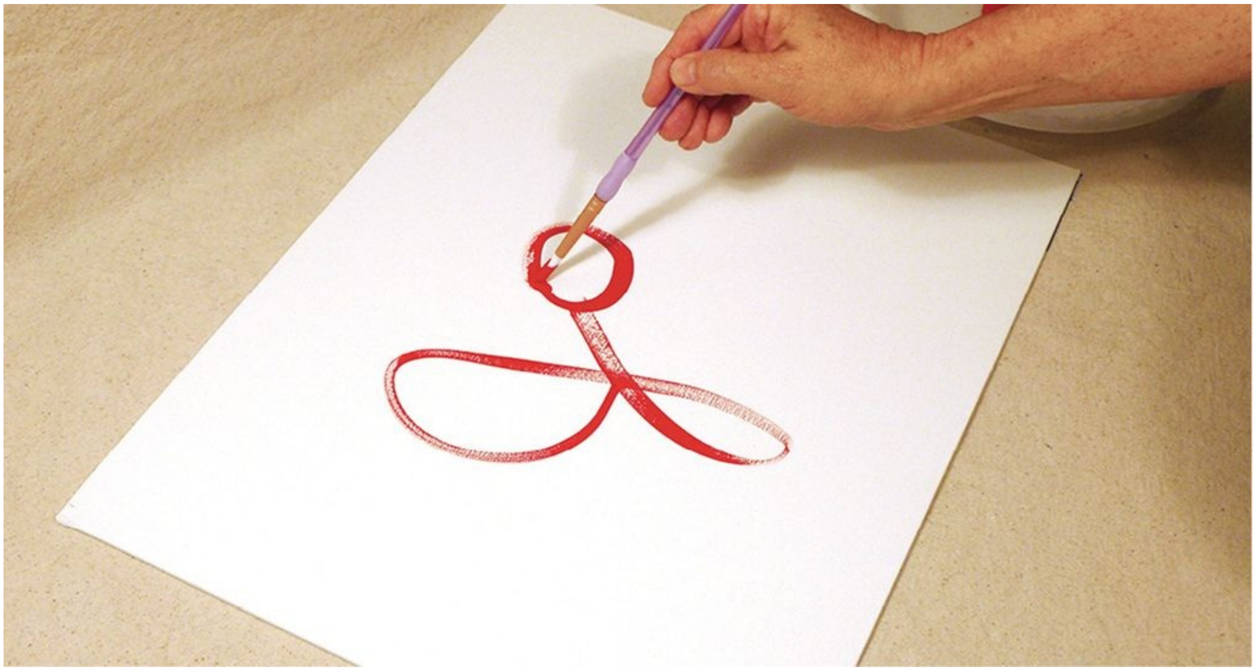
palette
polymer medium gloss
water container
paper towels or rags

VERSION ONE: ACRYLIC PAINT

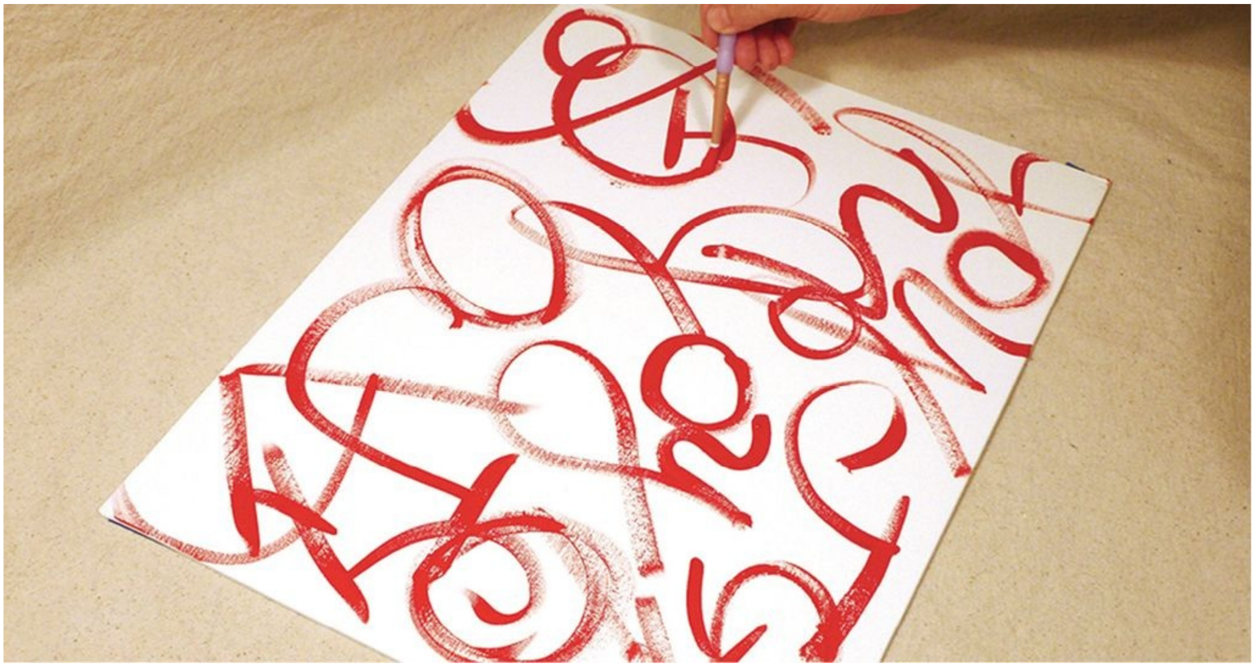
Choose a favorite color with which to start and a brush that has a nice feel to it. I like to use white Taklon brushes when I'm writing on canvas because they have a bit of spring and hold their shape.


GOLDEN
Pyrrole Red

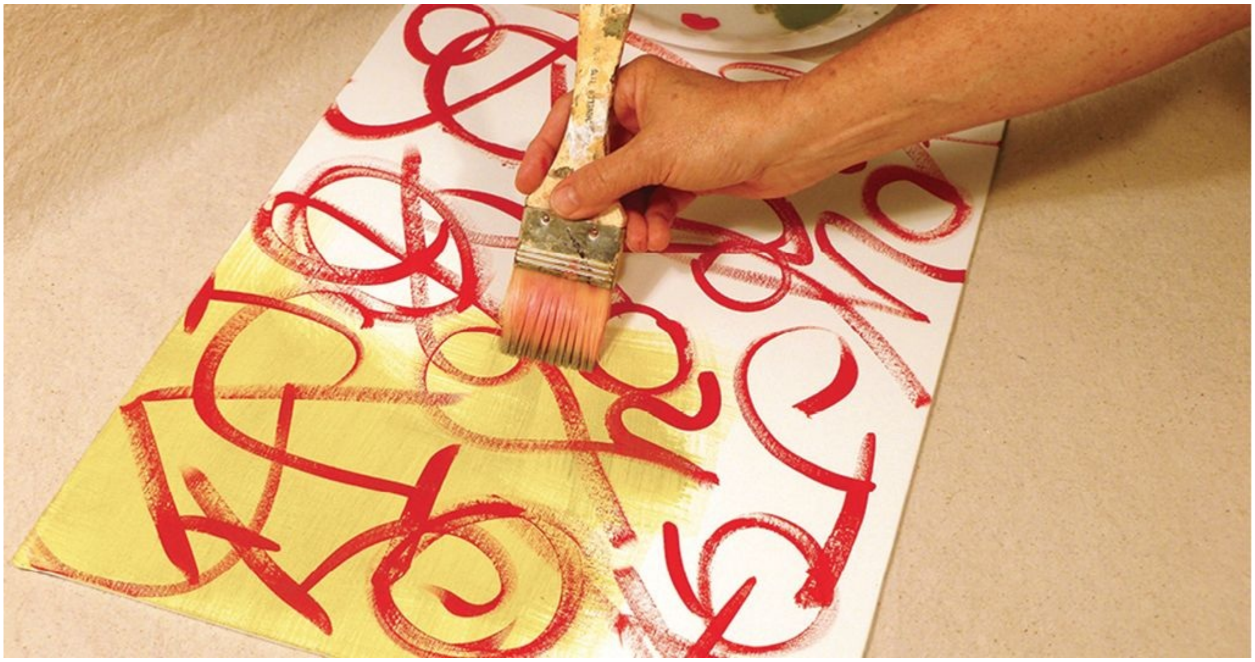
STEP 1 Set out about a tablespoon of Pyrrole Red fluid on your palette.



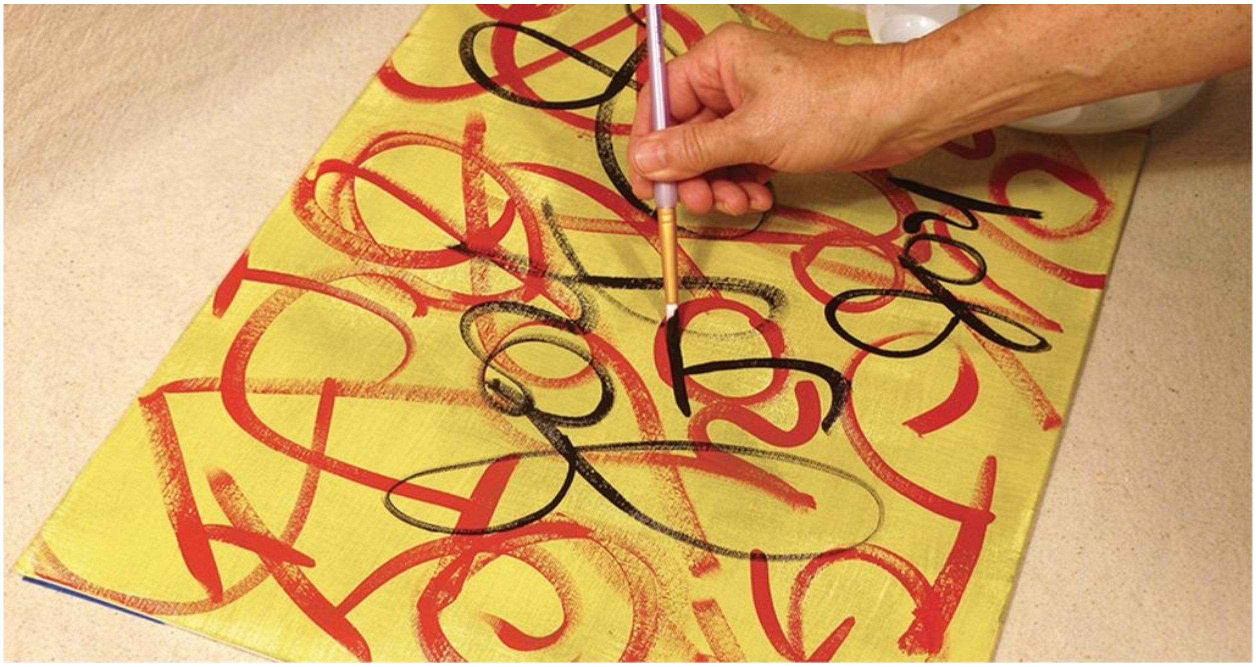
STEP 2 Start writing the word on your canvas or board.



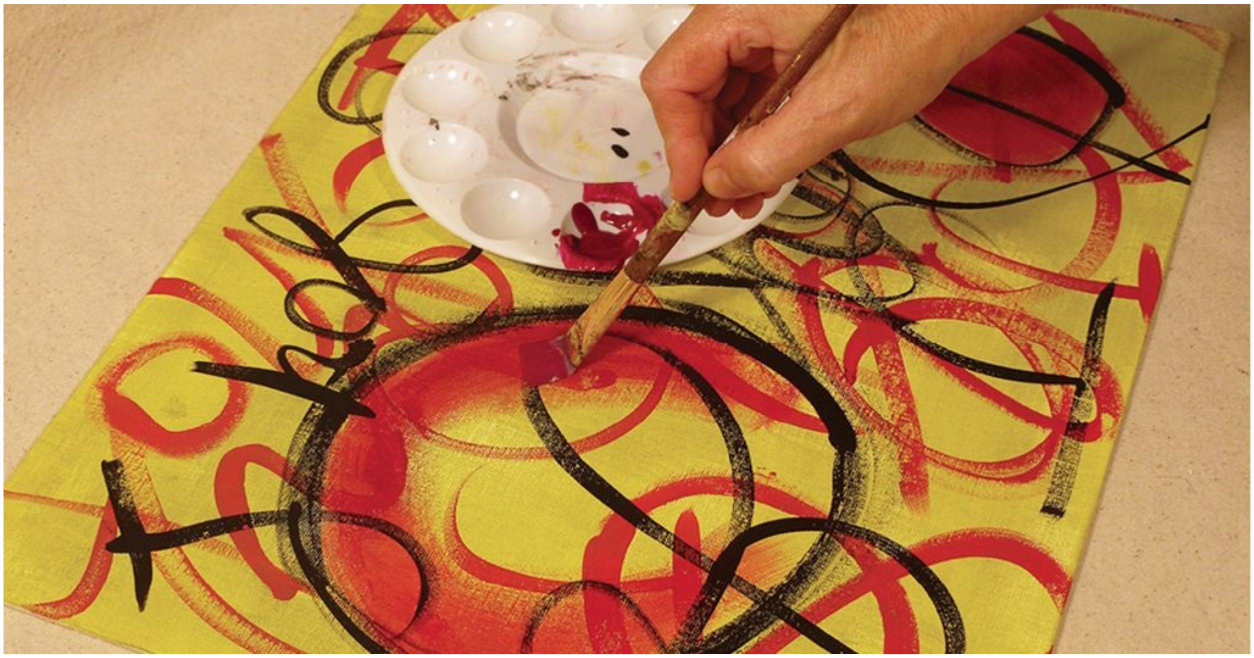
STEP 3 Continue writing, overlapping the letters and changing the sizes until the word is unrecognizable. Rotate the canvas so you are writing in different directions. Let the paint dry.



STEP 4 Paint a thin layer of Green Gold fluid over the dried Pyrrole Red words. Let the paint dry.

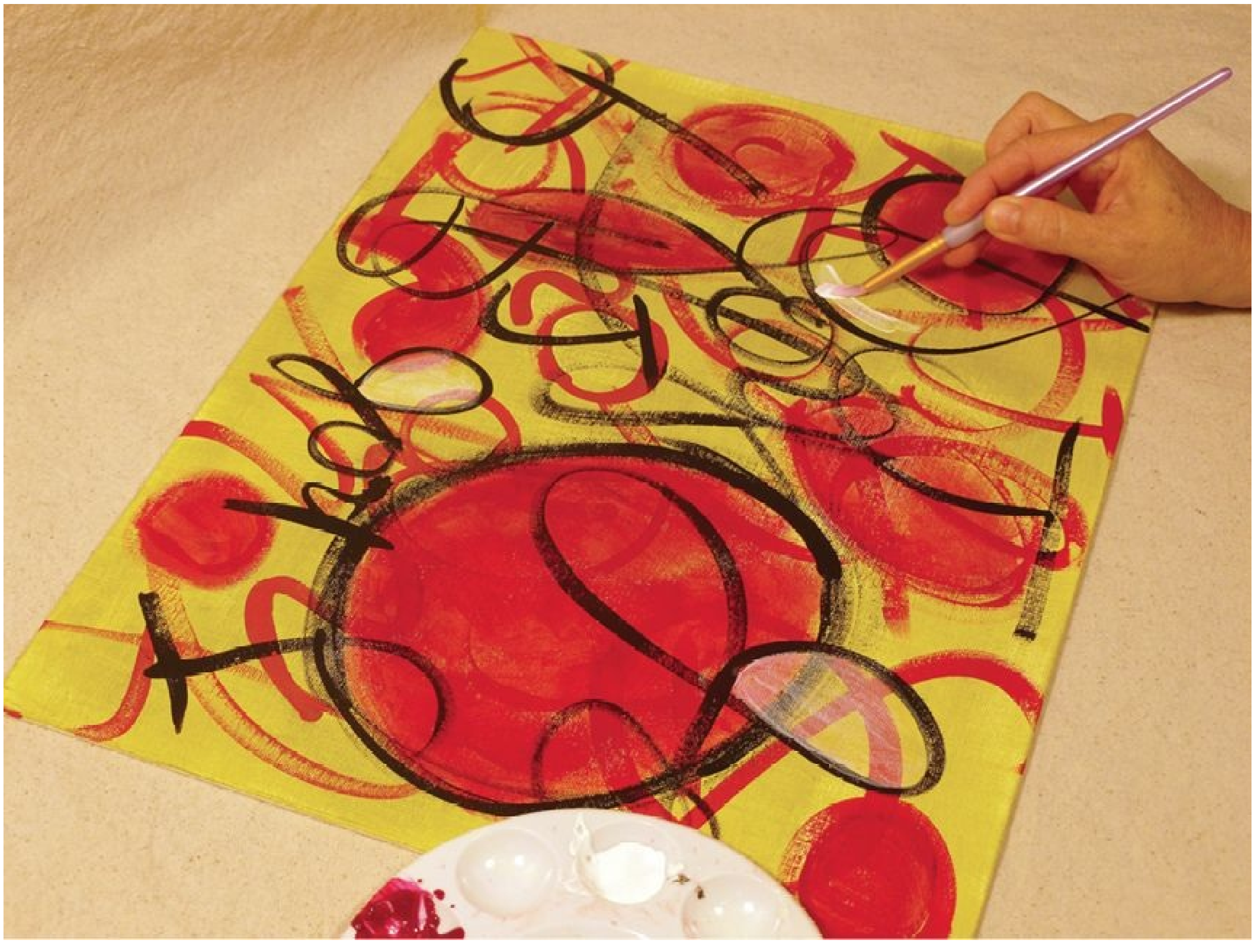


STEP 5 Begin another layer of words with Carbon Black. Continue writing, overlapping, moving and changing the sizes of the letters until this layer is also unrecognizable as a word.



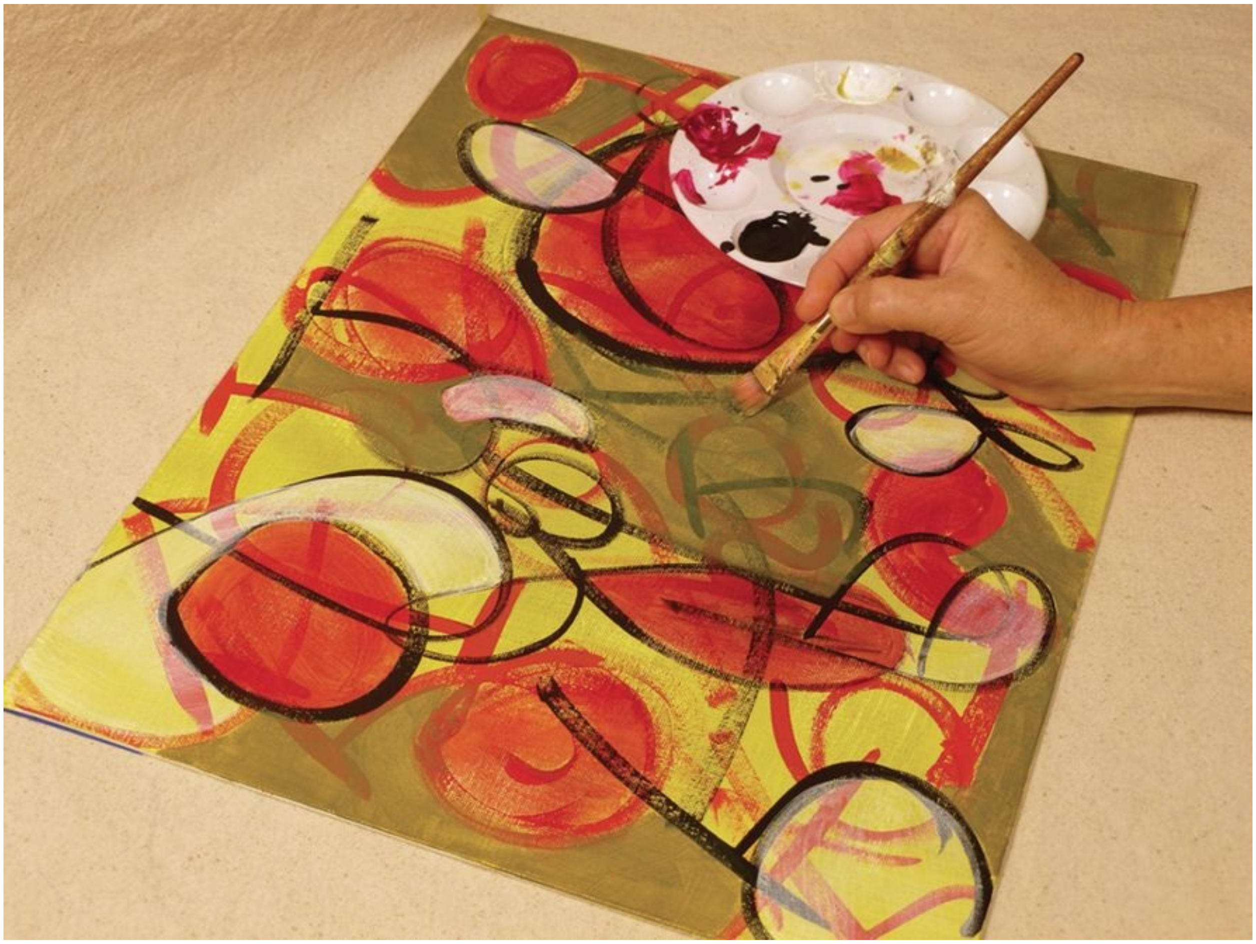
STEP 6 Choose shapes and paint them in with a thin layer of Quinacridone Magenta. Be sure the layer beneath is visible under the

magenta. Let this layer dry.



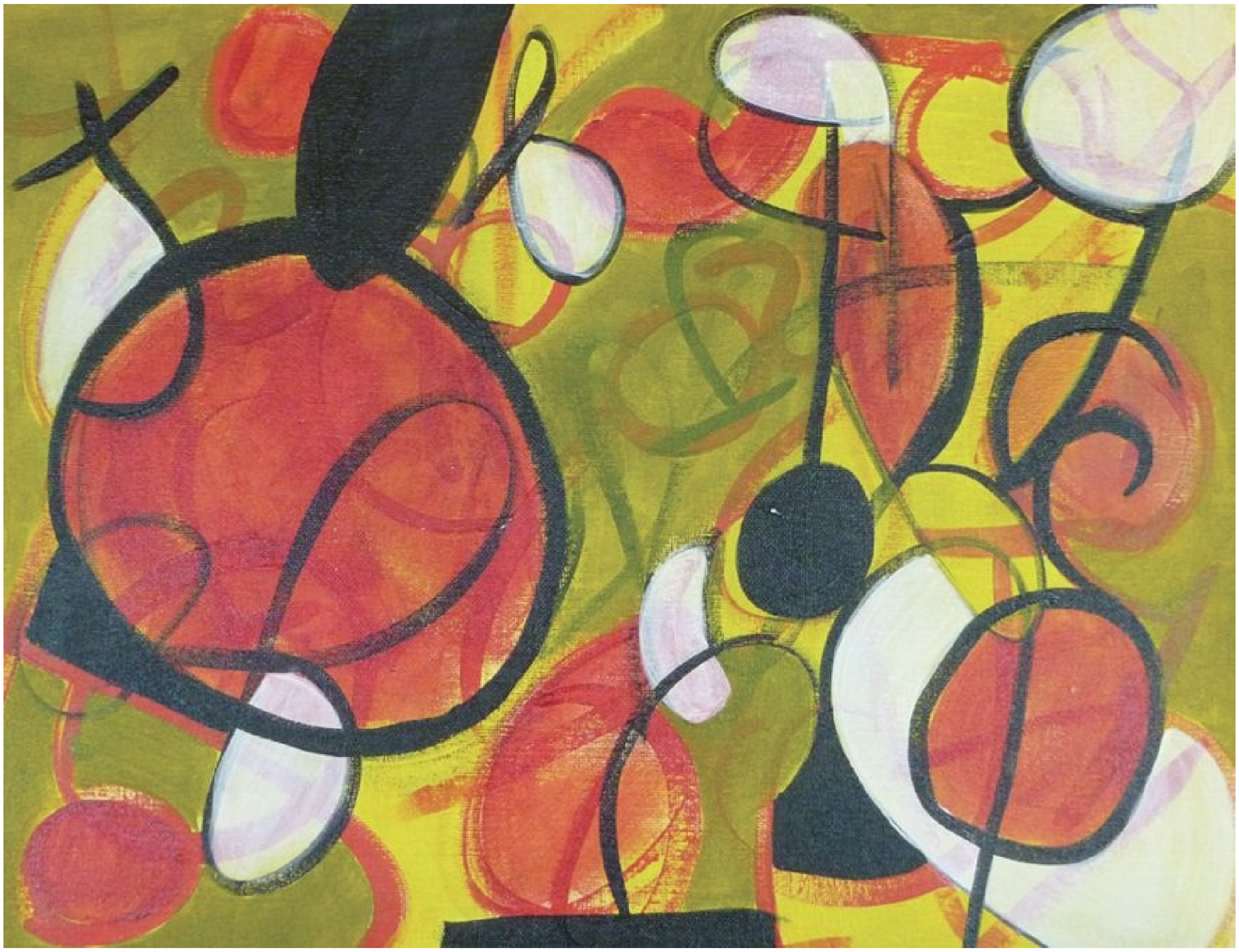
STEP 7 Paint in some shapes with a thin layer of Titanium White. Be sure not to use too much Titanium White since it tends to be very opaque. You may want to thin it with a little gloss medium.

STEP 8 Add just a tiny drop of Carbon Black to Green Gold to make a dark green.

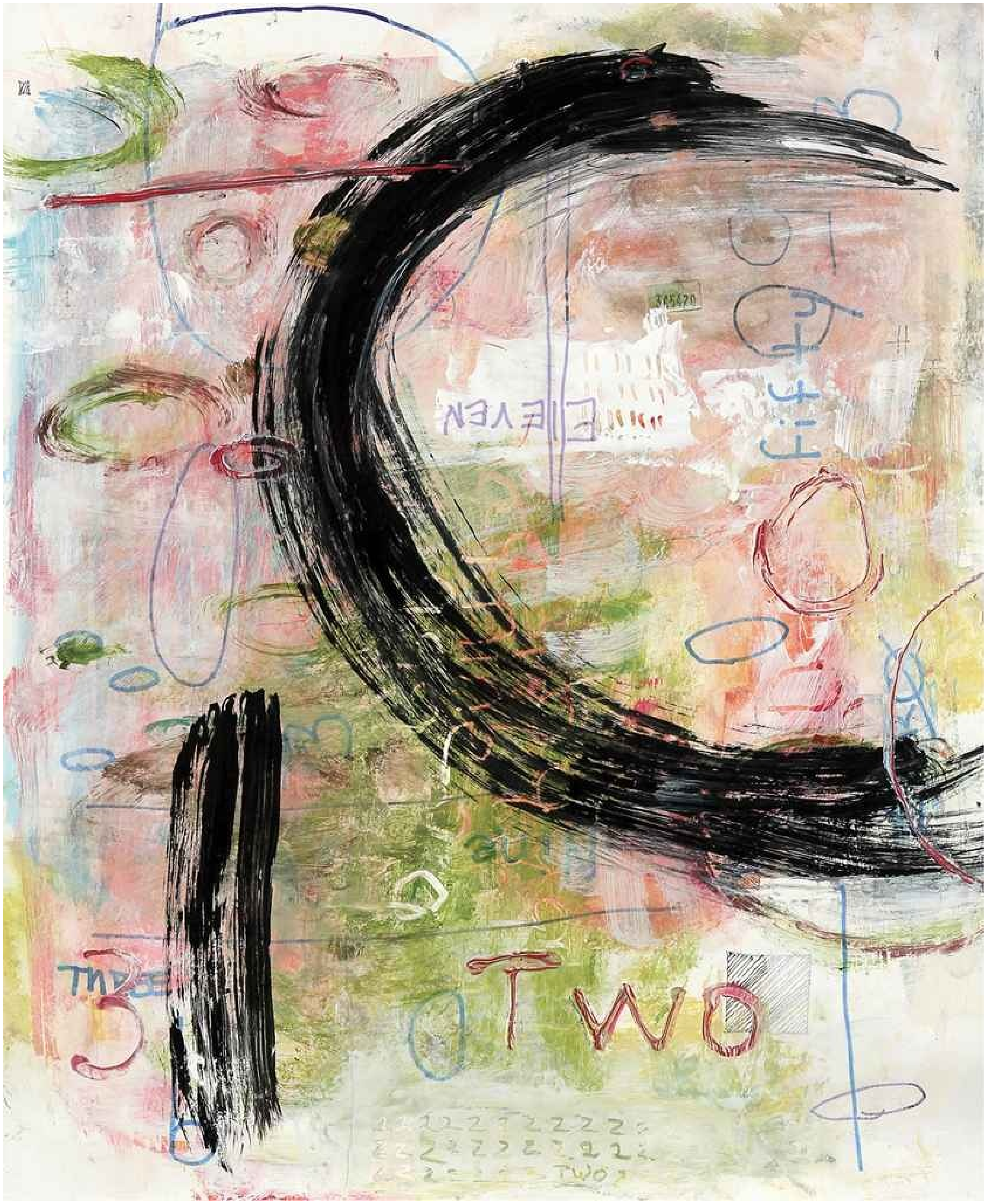


STEP 9 Paint in some of the shapes with this darker green, moving the dark green around the canvas to create a pleasing composition. (See tips

on composition.)



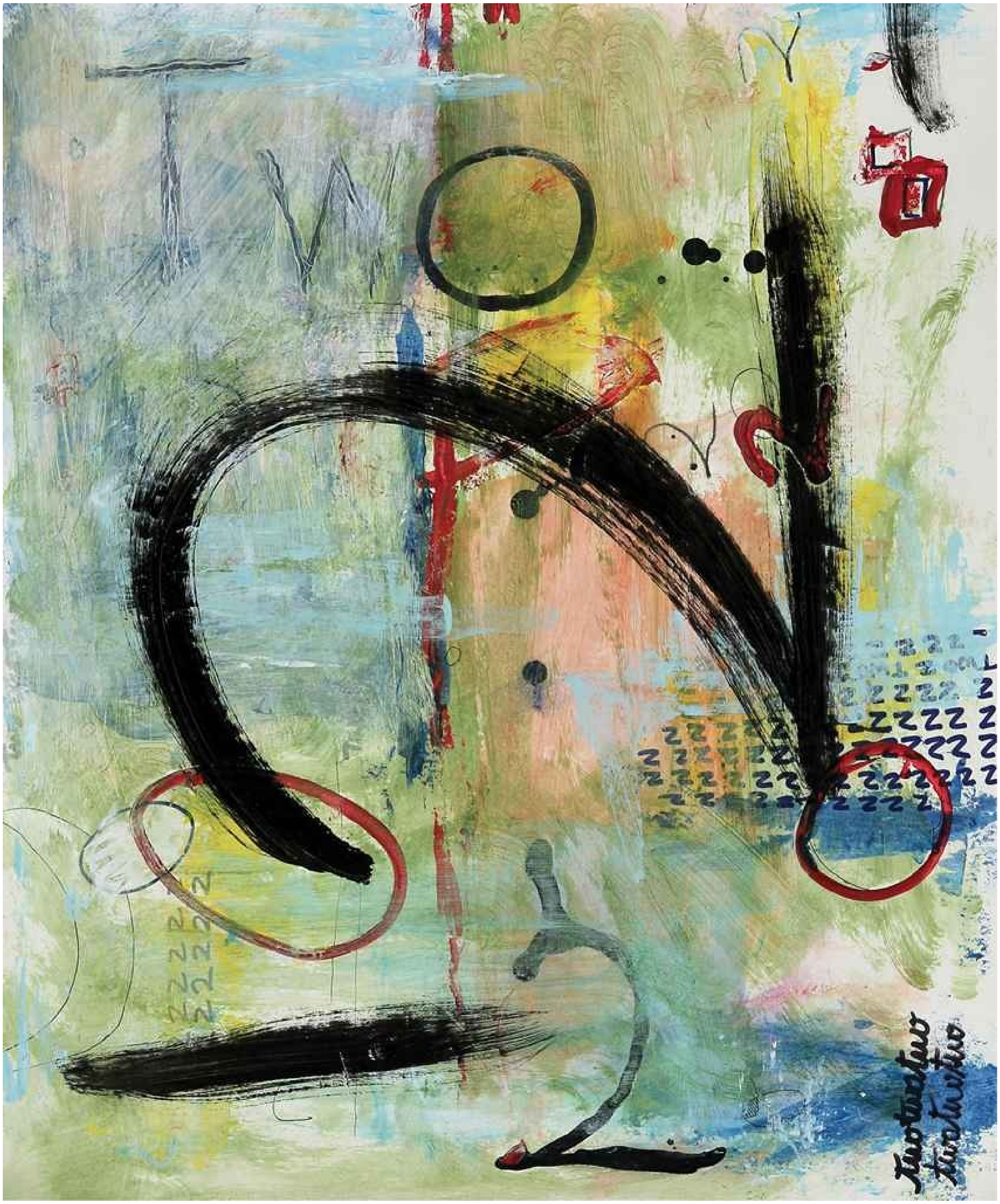
STEP 10 Finally, paint around some of the shapes in Carbon Black.



You can see how effectively Elise Marshall uses words in her work. Notice the depth she creates by layering words and numbers many times over.

ELEVEN

Elise Marshall
Acrylic and mixed media on Canson paper
14"× 17" (36cm × 43cm)



TWO

Elise Marshall

Acrylic and mixed media on Canson paper

14"× 17" (36cm × 43cm)

VERSION TWO: OIL PASTEL

Oil pastel makes a great tool for writing on canvas and will act as a resist to acrylic paint if you layer it heavy enough and if you put a bit of water in your paint.

What You Need

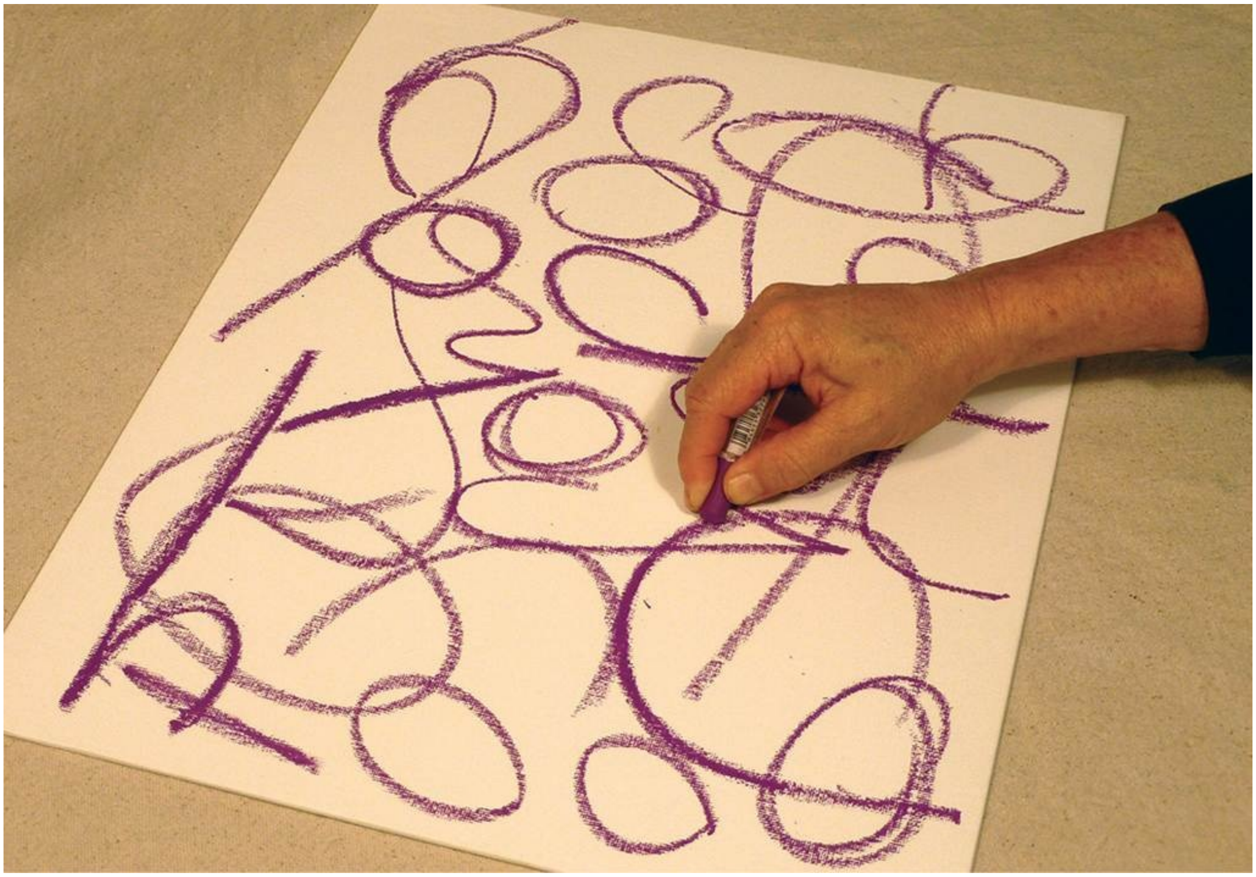
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
assorted brushes
canvas, canvas board or heavy weight watercolor paper oil pastels
Golden Absorbent Ground (if you are working on canvas) Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Quinacridone Magenta
- Green Gold
- Hansa Yellow Medium

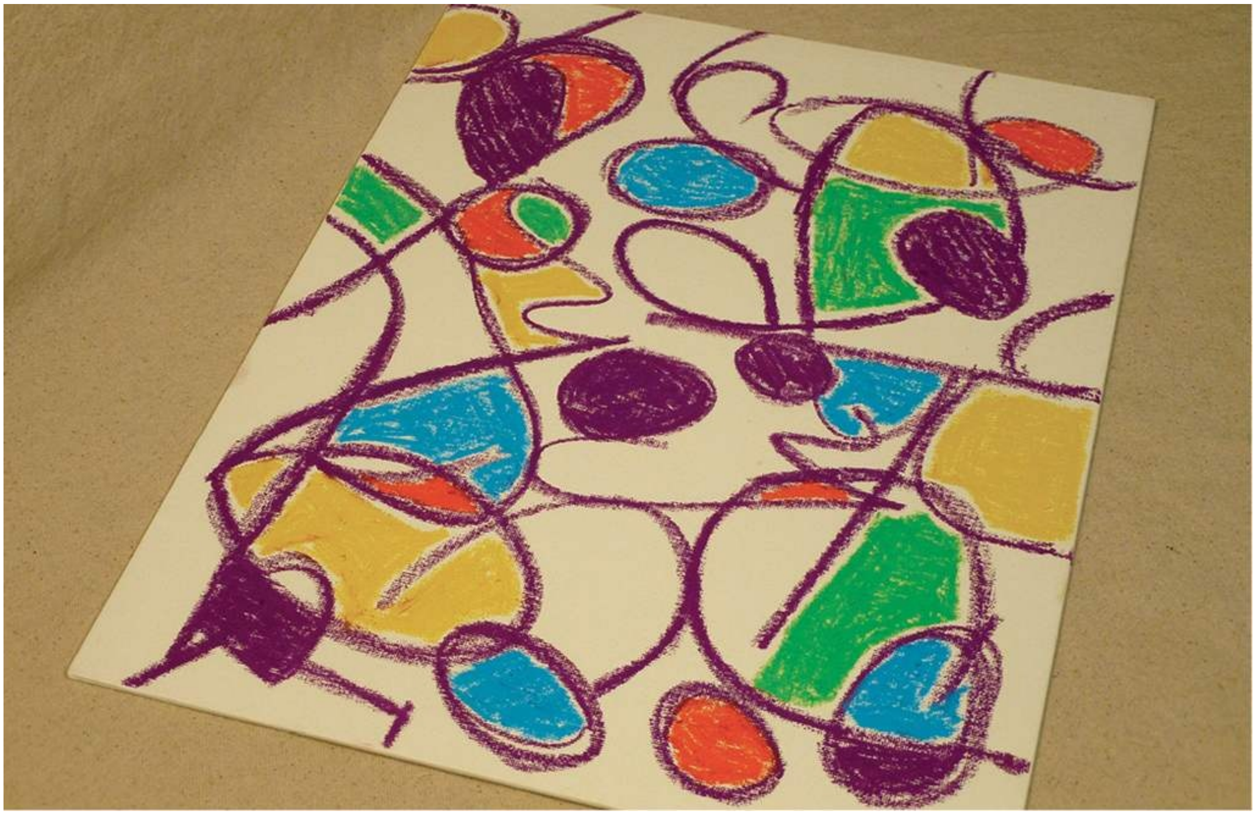
paper towels
palette
water container

GOLDEN
GESSOS & GROUNDS
Absorbent Ground (White)

STEP 1 (Skip this step if you are working on watercolor paper.) First cover your canvas with a layer of Absorbent Ground. Thin with a little water according to the label directions. Let it dry. Lay down one more layer of Absorbent Ground, and let it dry.

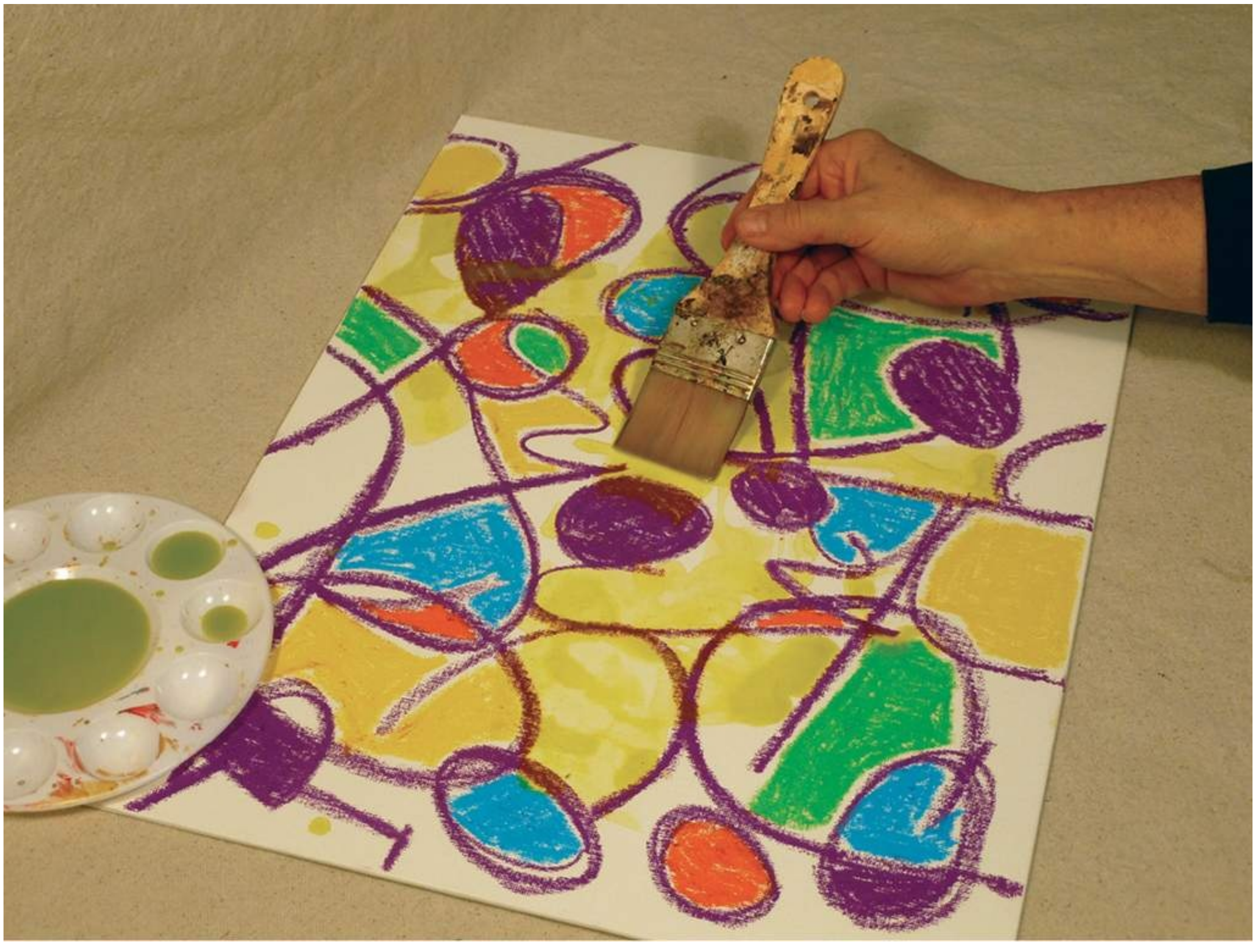


STEP 2 Using an oil pastel in a bright color, write the word on the canvas, laying down the pastel heavily in some areas. Remember to overlap the word and keep writing it until it is unrecognizable.

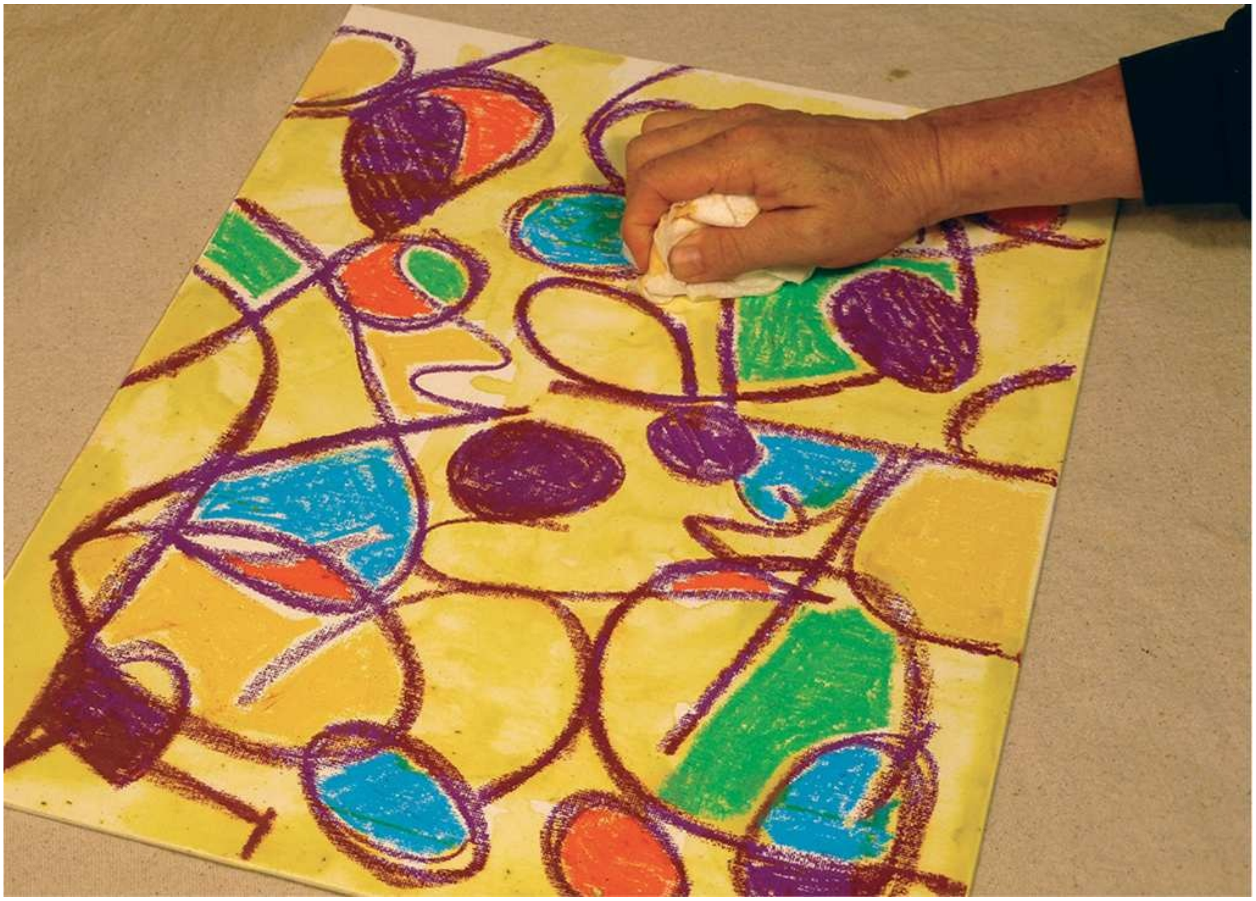


STEP 3 Using bright colors, fill in the negative shapes with more oil pastel. Be sure to lay the pastel down fairly heavy so it will resist the acrylic mixed with water in the next step.

STEP 4 Mix two drops of Green Gold fluid paint with about ¼ cup of water to make a thin, watery green paint.



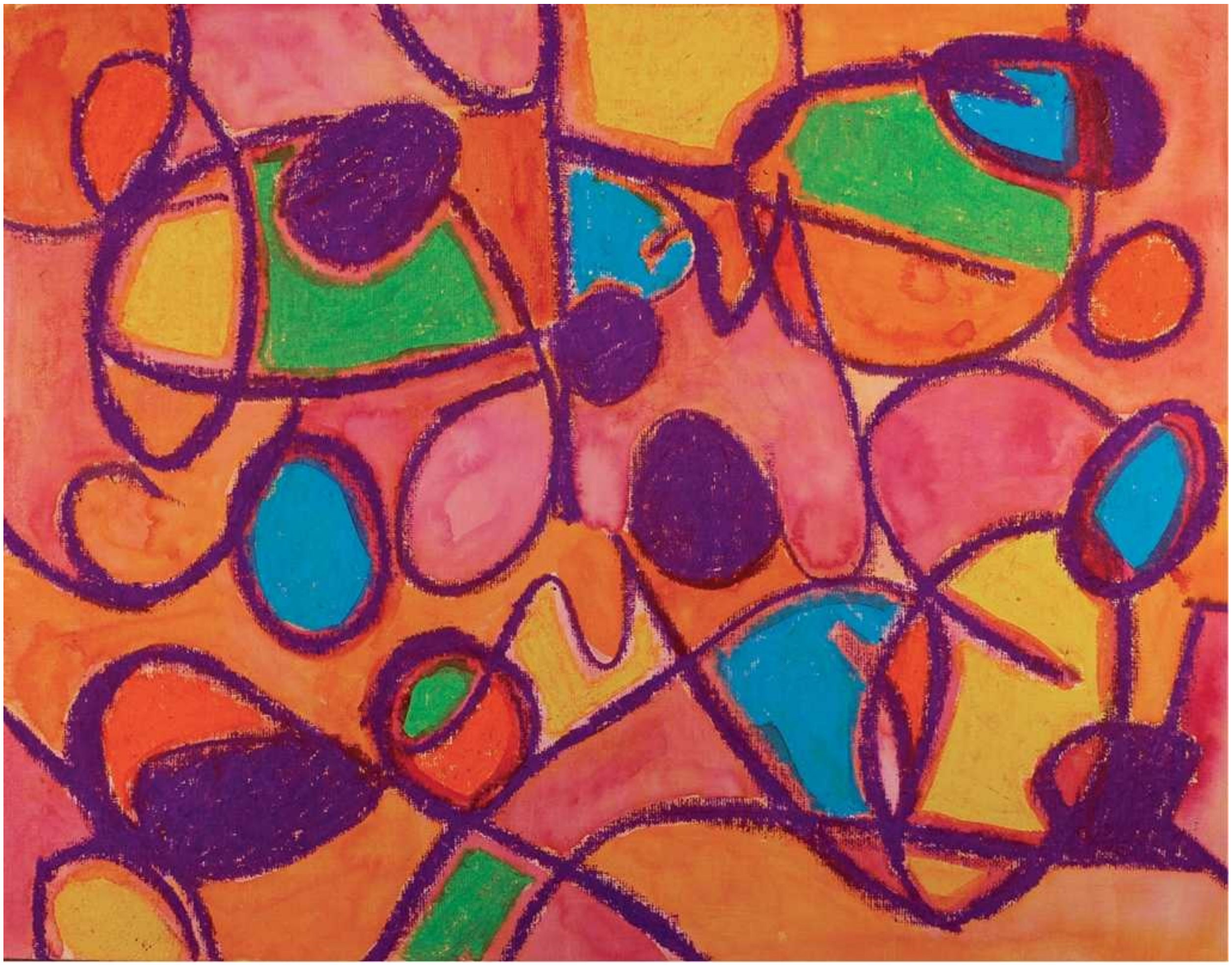
STEP 5 Gently paint a layer of this very watery paint over the oil pastel shapes. You will notice that the paint/water mixture beads up on the oil pastel and does not soak in. Let this layer dry.



STEP 6 If you get too much water or paint down on the canvas and want to blot some up, you can do so with a paper towel. Just be sure you blot; don't rub.

STEP 7 Mix two drops of Quinacridone Magenta fluid with about ¼ cup of water to make a thin pink paint. Gently lay this down over the dried green layer. Let this layer dry.

STEP 8 Continue painting with Quinacridone Magenta and add in Hansa Yellow Medium, using less water than before. This will create more saturated color.



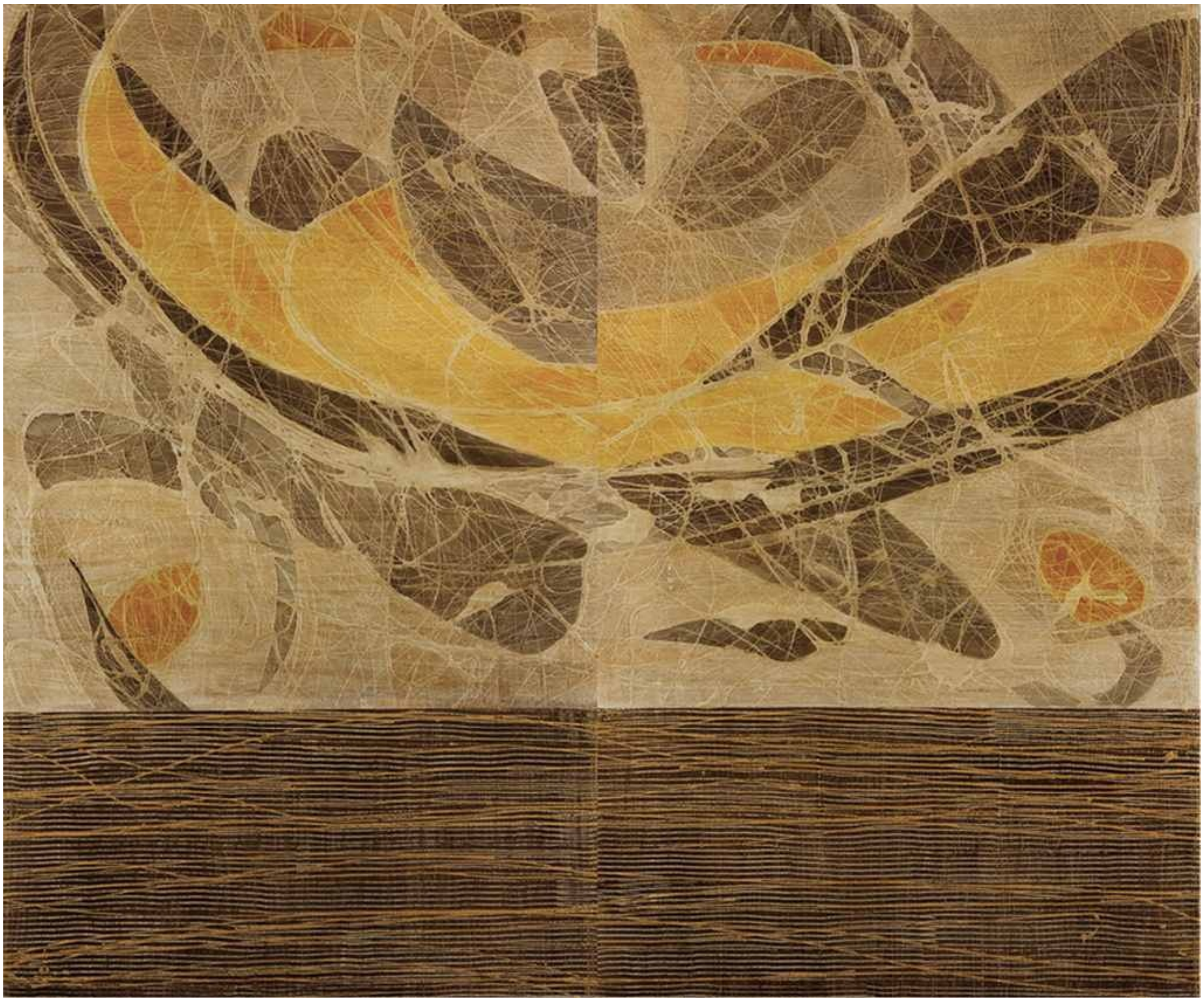
Here's the end result. A vibrant painting using the word joy, and it looks joyful, too. Think of all the wonderful words you can start with as well as poems, names of places you've visited, songs, words in foreign languages—even food. There are many possibilities with this technique. Where will it take you?

EXPLORATION EIGHT

Exploring Abstractions

Reality is interpreted by the artist and sometimes copied so closely that it resembles a photograph as in photorealist painting. Oftentimes artists don’t attempt to paint reality because they are afraid of failing. After all, it takes a fairly high level of skill to draw or paint a beautiful still life or portrait. But what if you want to express your *feelings* or *interpretation* of a beautiful still life or flower arrangement? Do you have to wait until you have all the necessary skills to re-create it exactly? I don’t think so. I’d like to offer you the option of using abstraction as a way to express what you see around you.

“Finding inspiration in the world around you is easy—if you simplify what you see.” —Tesia Blackburn



This painting is abstracted from a lotus flower. In some way, all two-dimensional art is an abstraction no matter how closely it resembles the subject.

ESULTANZA

Tesia Blackburn Acrylic on canvas 60" × 72" (152cm × 183cm)

Seeing in Shapes

You may have profound feelings about your rose garden or your child’s baby shoes. How can you express that without painting an exact re-creation? You can abstract from them to create a painting that expresses how you *feel* about the roses or any other subject.

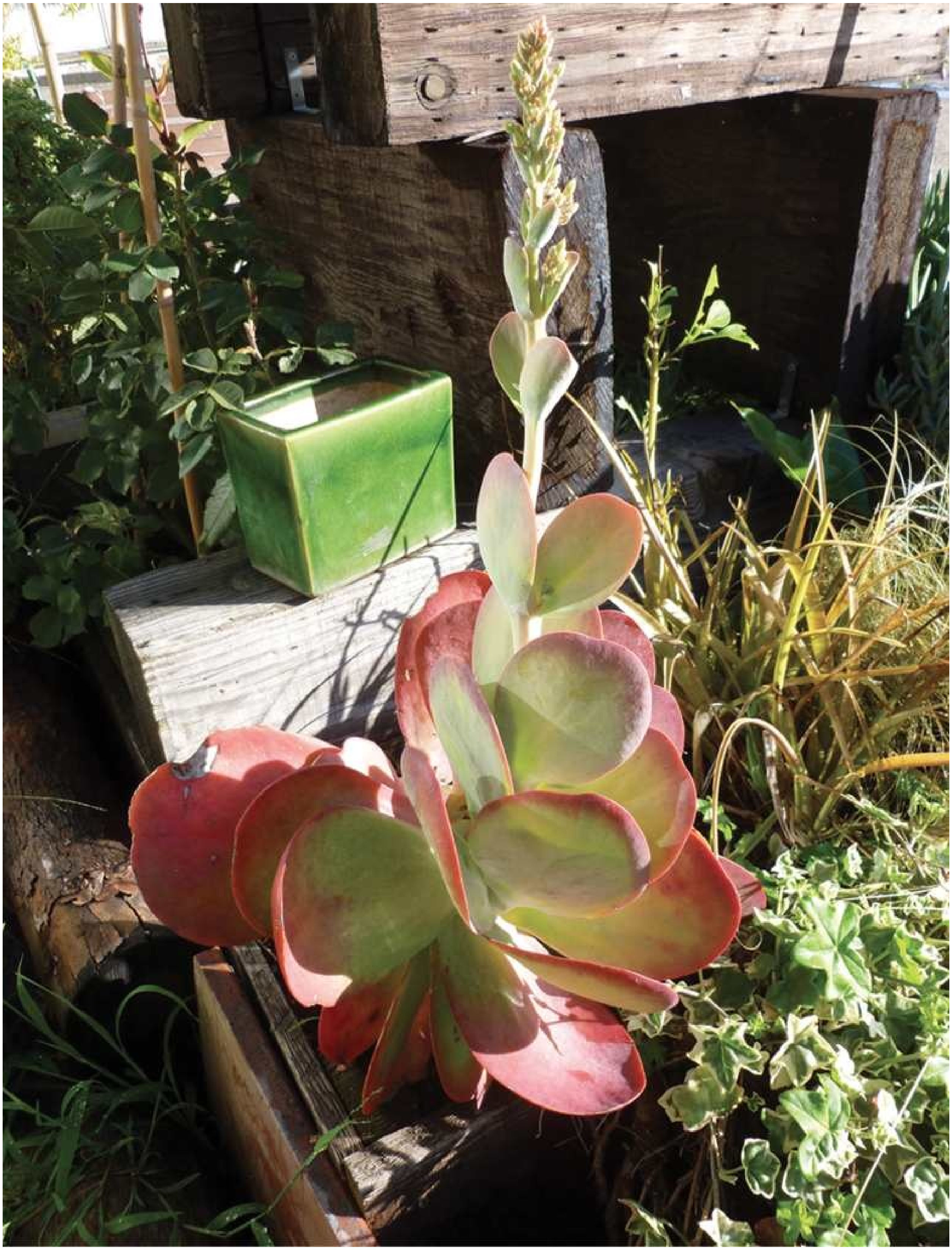
Remember at the start of the book, we learned the six main design elements needed to create a painting. These same elements apply to this exploration, whether you are painting apples or abstracts. Just by using these formal elements, you can create beautiful, meaningful abstracts.

What You Need

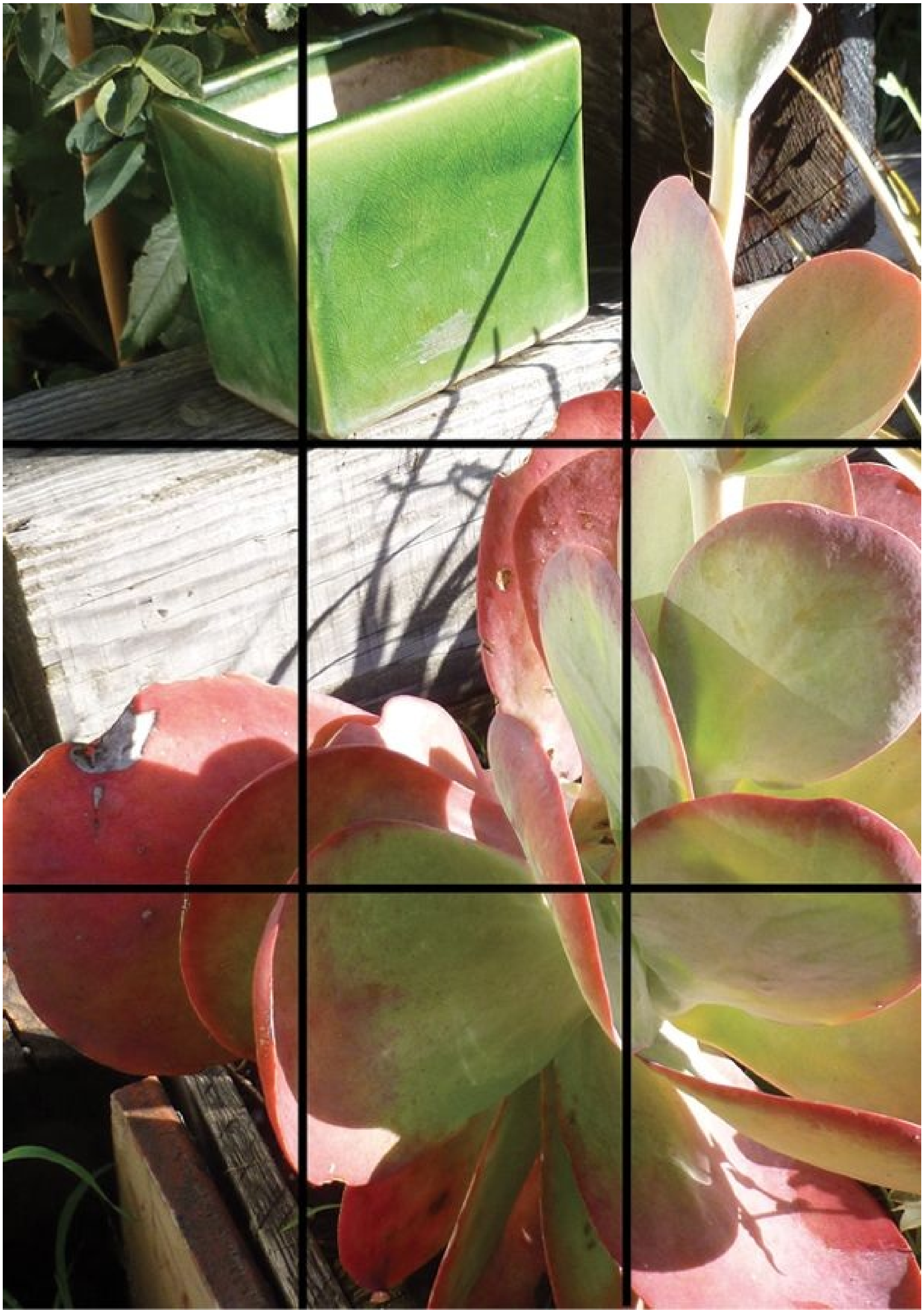
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
pencil (to create viewfinder)
ruler (to create viewfinder)
canvas, bristol board or heavyweight watercolor paper
assorted brushes, including one round brush
palette
Golden Fluid Acylics, your choice
paper towels
craft knife

VERSION ONE: ABSTRACTED FROM NATURE

The end result of this exploration is an abstracted version of a succulent from my garden, and it captures the bright sunny afternoons I spend in the garden at my studio!



STEP 1 This is a photograph I took in the garden at my studio. I love the succulents we have in the garden. Nature offers us patterns and shapes that make great abstracts. First we have to simplify the photograph so we don’t get caught up in too much detail.

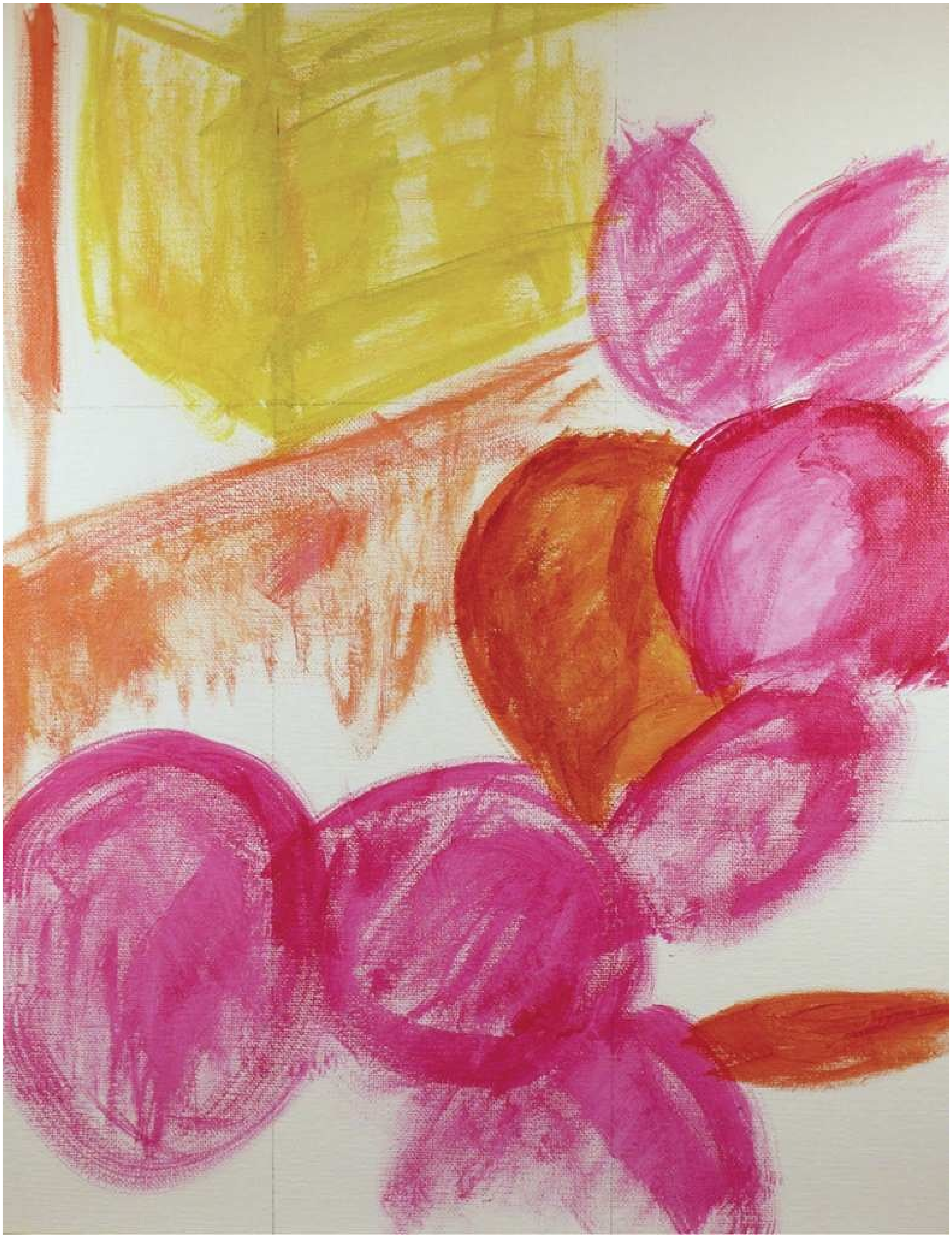


STEP 2 Here I’ve cropped in on the photograph using a viewfinder to maximize the shapes and patterns, deleting much of the complexity. I’m keen on using rhythm and repetition as my main design principles here. See Making a Viewfinder at the end of this chapter.

The Rule of Thirds

Many books have been written on the rules of composition, but the main rule used here to crop in on this photograph is the Rule of Thirds.

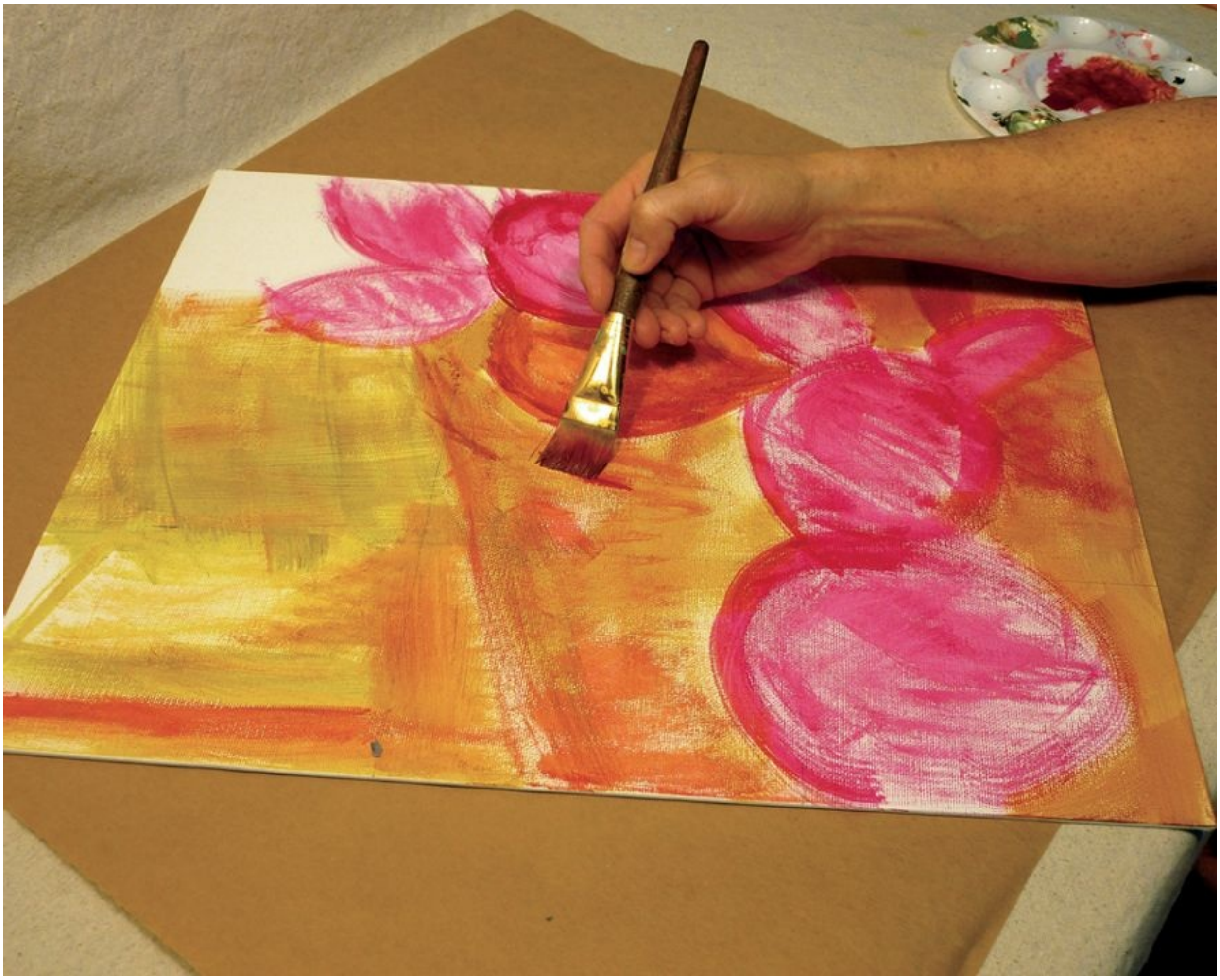
Simply put, you divide your canvas into three equal parts—both vertically and horizontally. The spots where those lines intersect are called the “sweet spots.” Putting the main focus on one of those spots and adding secondary points of interest on other sweet spots will give your painting a sense of balance and harmony.



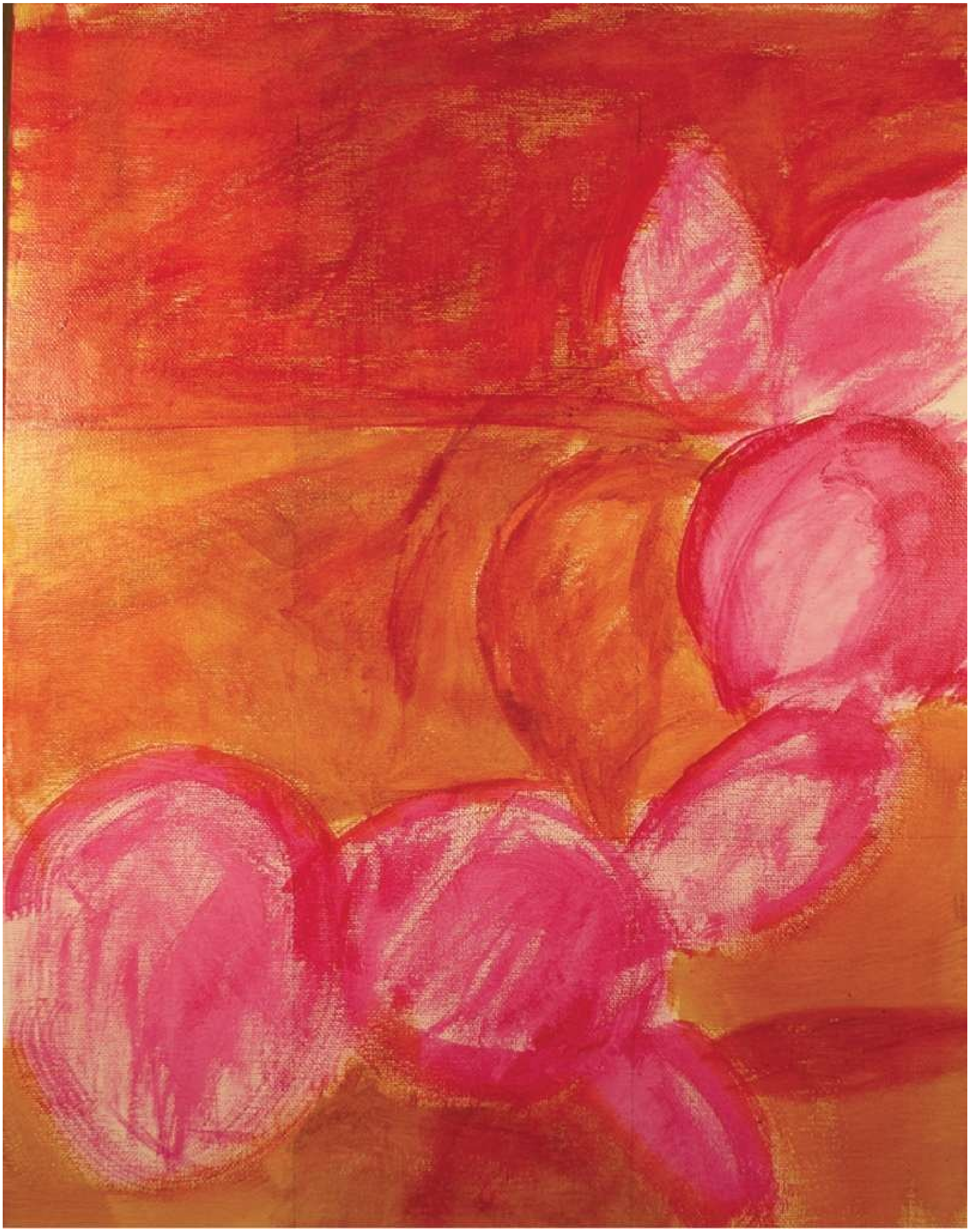
STEP 3 Roughly block in the biggest shapes in the photograph, leaving out almost all the detail. Remember we're going for an abstracted version of the photograph, not a rendering of fine detail. Look for repeated shapes and patterns and hone in on those.

You'll also need a little contrast. I used the rounded shapes of the succulent and repeated that with some variation. Then bring in some contrast to all of the initial shapes. I used the green square vase for a contrast with the round shapes.

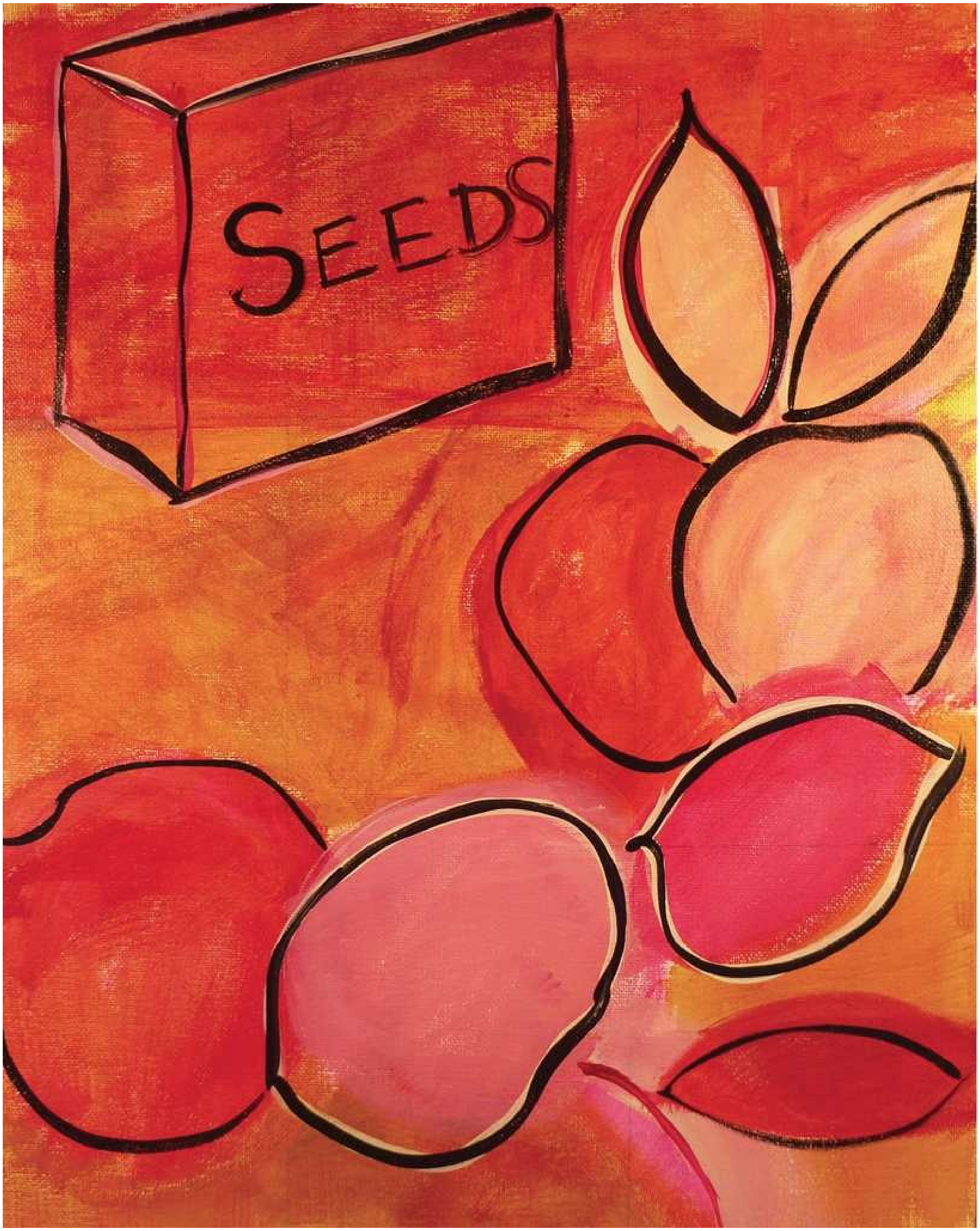
Using just two colors (I used Quinacridone Magenta and Green Gold), scrub thin fluid paint into the canvas, letting plenty of white canvas show through.



STEP 4 Lay down a couple more layers of very thin paint, letting the underpainting show through and deleting unnecessary details. Here I added a tiny bit of Titan Buff to create muted tints that help to vary the value of the leaves.



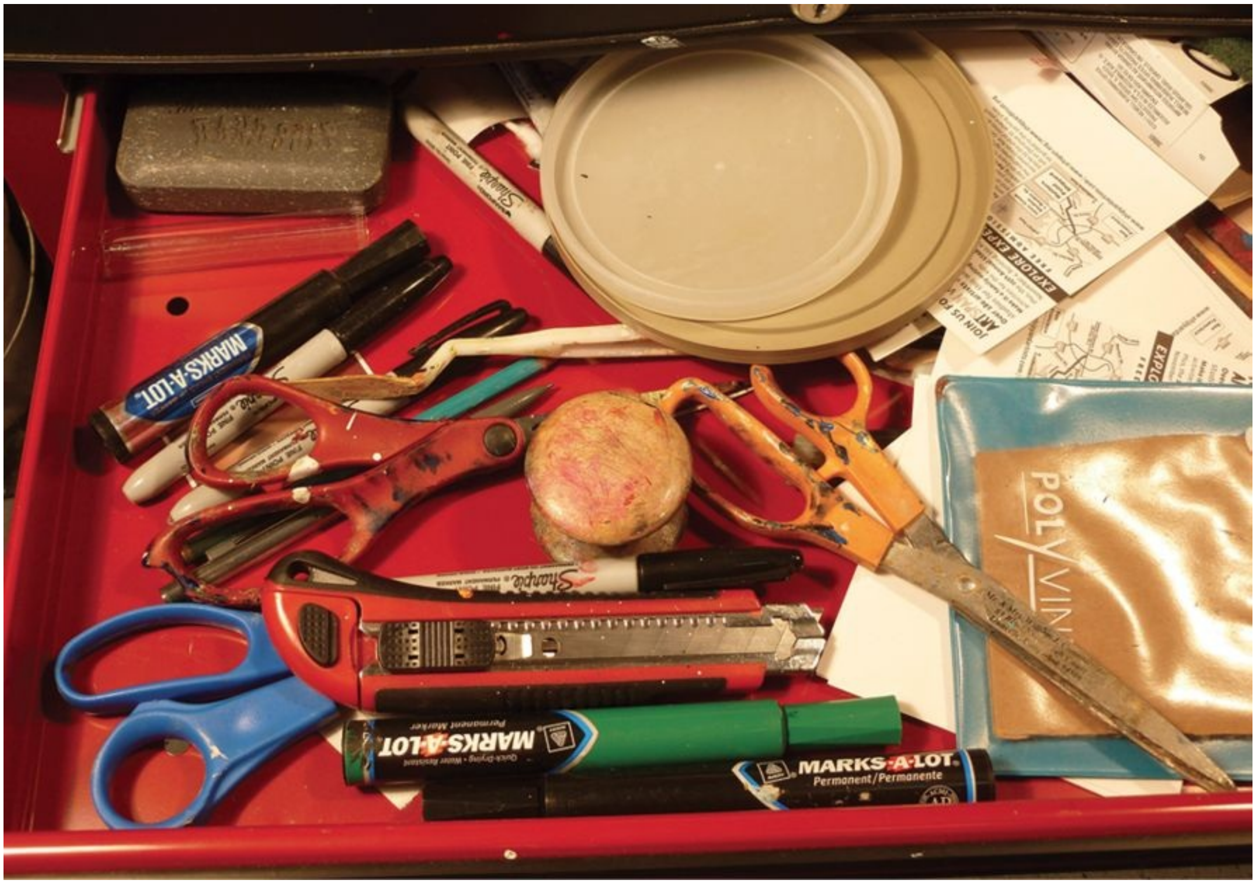
STEP 5 Continue to build up thin layers of paint, scrubbing the paint into the canvas.



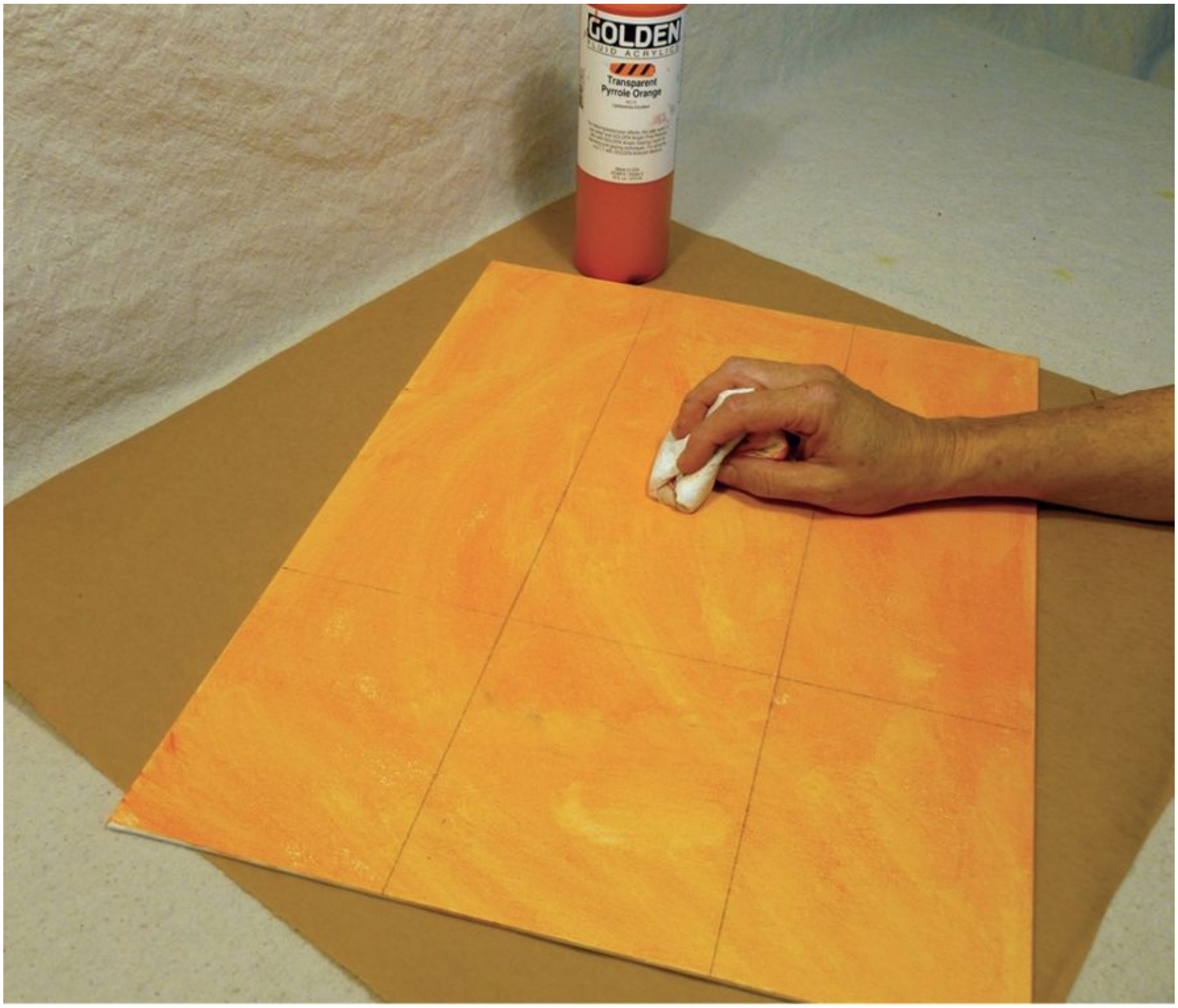
Finally, the square green vase was brought back but in line only, and I added a black line for contrast in the leaves. You'll notice that the edge of the vase lands *squarely on one of the sweet spots horizontally and that the top of the lower left-hand leaf rests right on the horizontal line of the bottom one-third.*

VERSION TWO: JUNK DRAWER

We sometimes get so overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information that's in front of us that we lose the magic of the scene. Take your kitchen junk drawer, for instance. It's probably a peek into your world. I know mine is! Can you imagine a painting of your junk drawer? How on earth would you paint all the odds and ends in the drawer? Without going crazy on the details, how about just capturing the essence of the junk drawer?

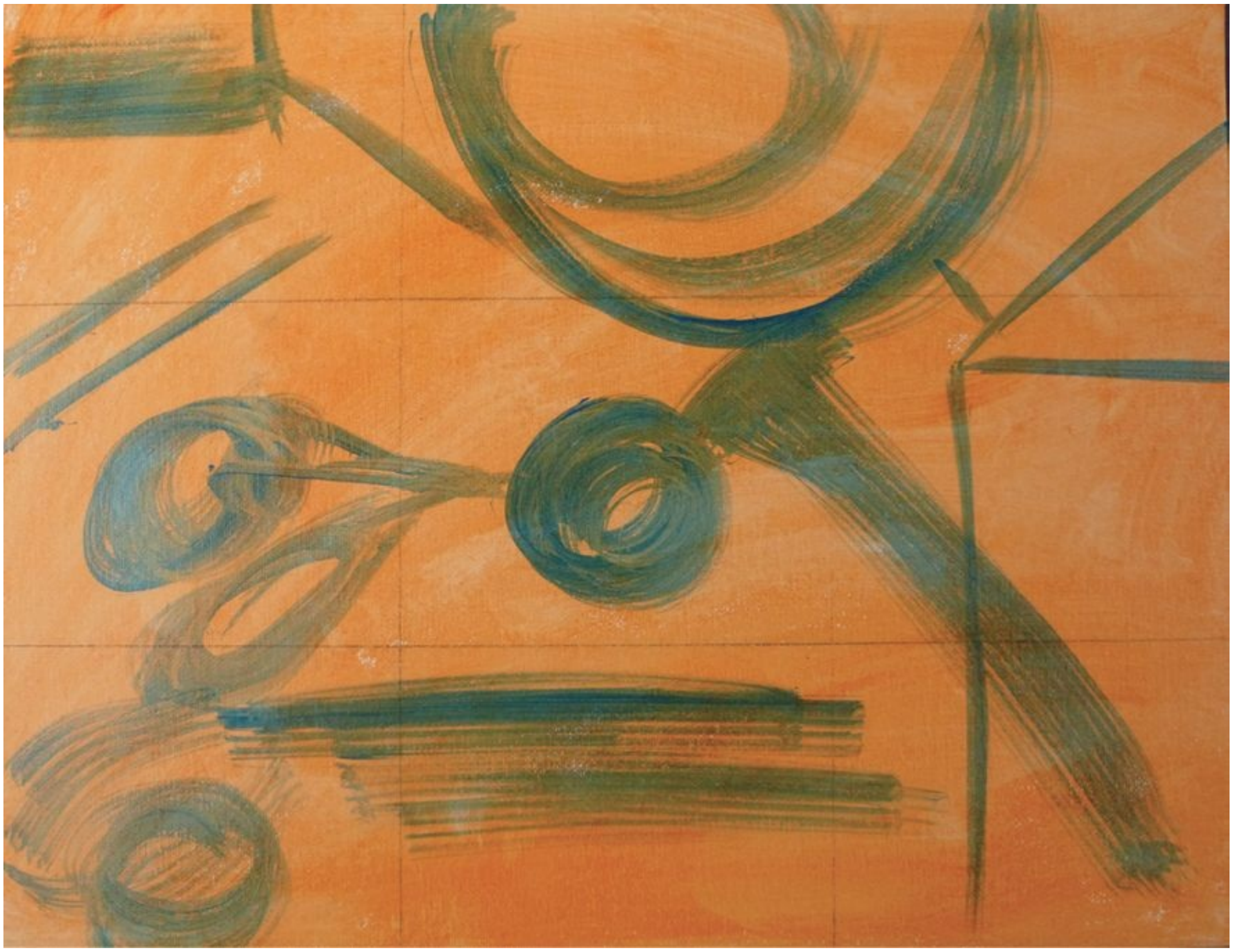


STEP 1 First, I took a photograph of my junk drawer. This one happens to be at my studio.

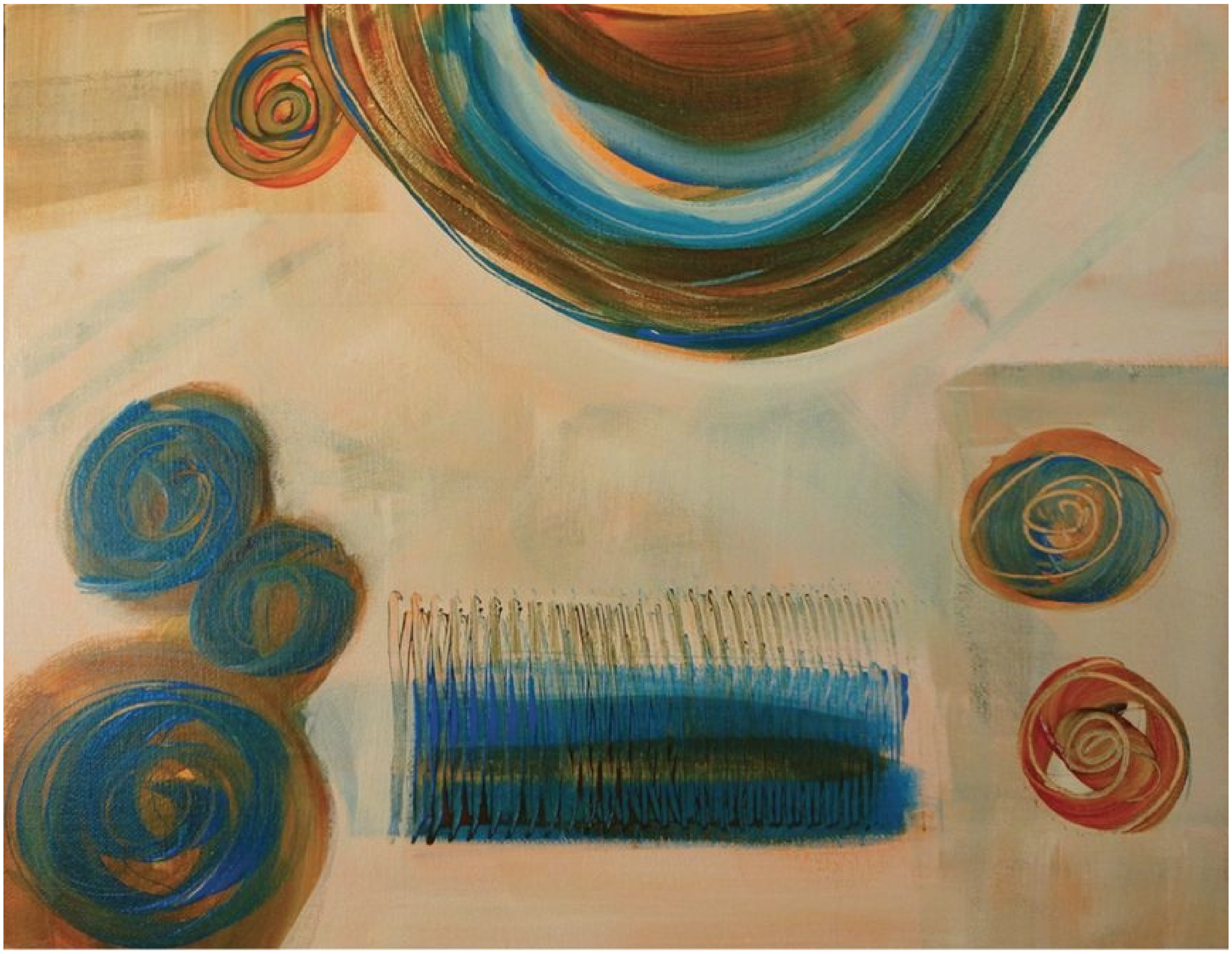


GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Transparent
Pyrrole Orange

STEP 2 I drew a grid on my canvas again, dividing it into three sections horizontally and vertically. Then I toned the entire canvas with Transparent Pyrrole Orange to pick up the red of the drawer.



STEP 3 Using Historical Manganese Blue Hue, I blocked in very rough shapes to resemble the largest shapes in the drawer, leaving out all of the details. I didn’t draw the scissors or every pen and marker. I just used big lines to indicate where those shapes were. I’ve simplified the entire drawer down to a few lines.



STEP 4 After refining the composition and deleting the unnecessary details, here is the end result.

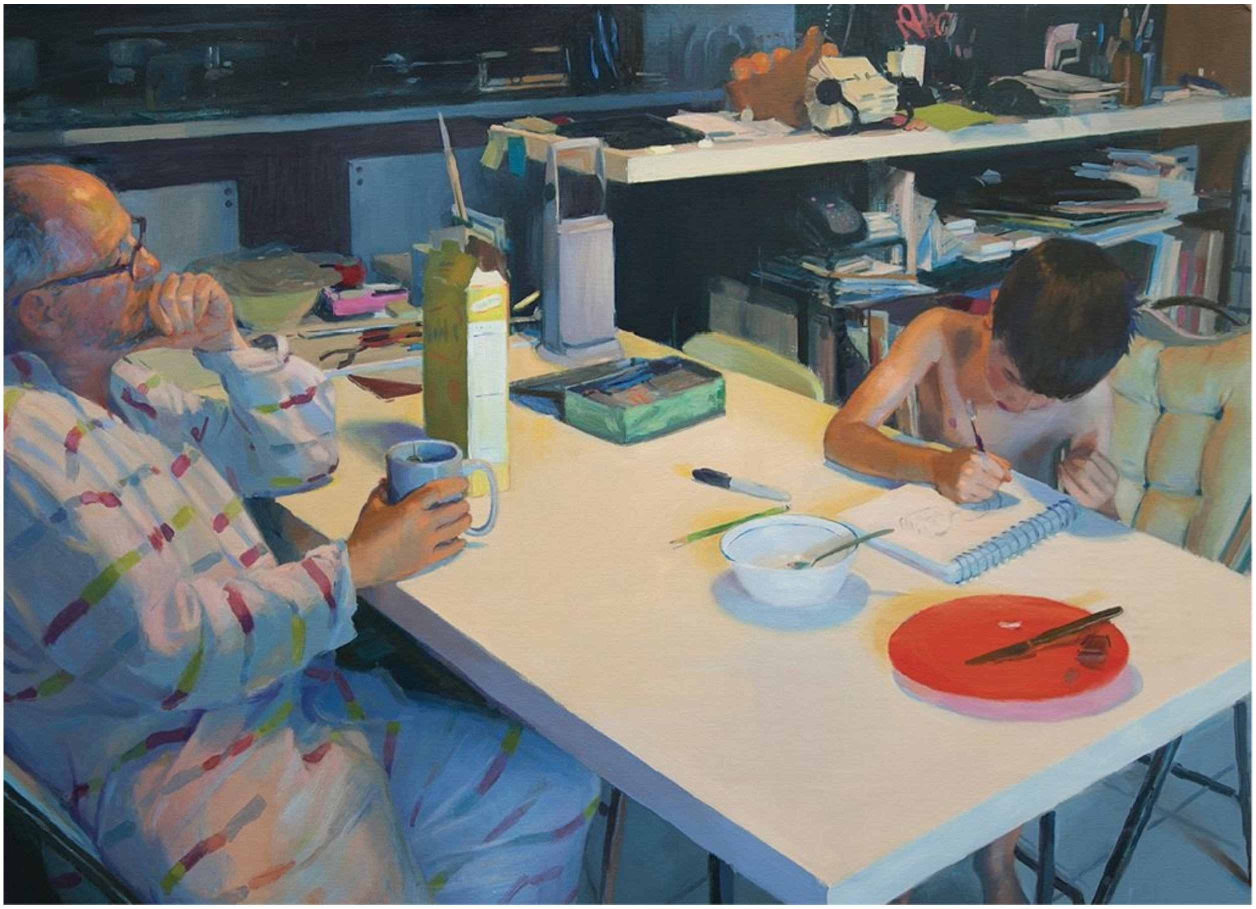
I moved the small circle that was dead center up and to the left so it contrasts nicely with the larger circles. I deleted the strong diagonal shape coming in from the lower right-hand side. I repeated the circular shapes from the lower left on the right-hand side to create a triangular composition. Finally, I simplified all of the horizontal shapes, the mat knife and markers, from the original photo into one horizontal bar with some texture.

VERSION THREE: ABSTRACTED FROM A MODERN MASTER

I love the Old Masters. They were masters for a reason. Every inch of the canvas was composed to work perfectly. I love the way a representational masterpiece can be broken down into beautiful abstract paintings. Take any 2" (5cm) square of a Renaissance masterpiece, and you will get a beautiful abstract painting.

Now add to that a particular painting that you love, and you have the basis for an entire series. Many great artists paid homage to masters that they loved. Picasso paid homage to Goya, Velásquez and El Greco; Rembrandt was influenced by Caravaggio; Robert Rauschenberg idolized Willem de Kooning.

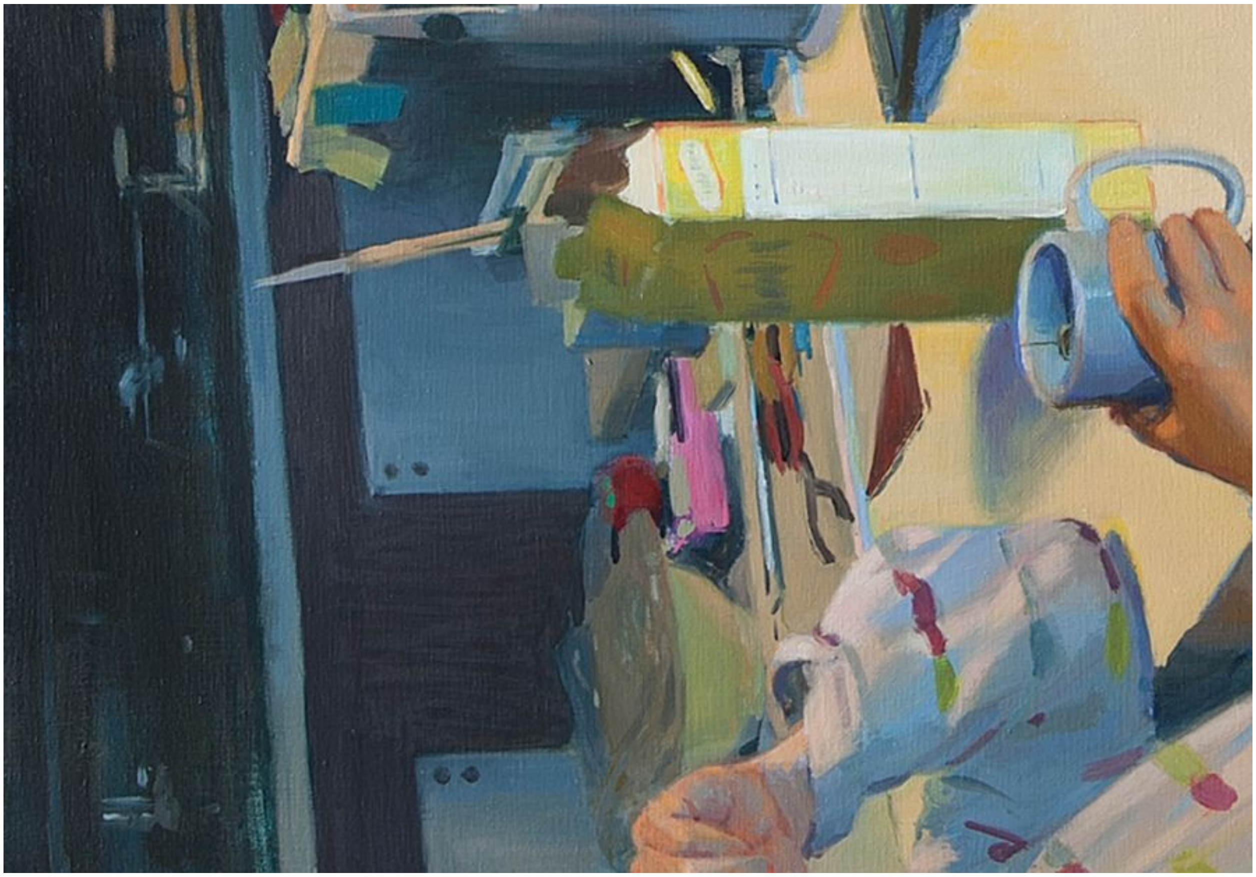
My friend Stanley Goldstein is a modern master in the realist tradition. I asked him if I could use one of his paintings to demonstrate this abstract technique.



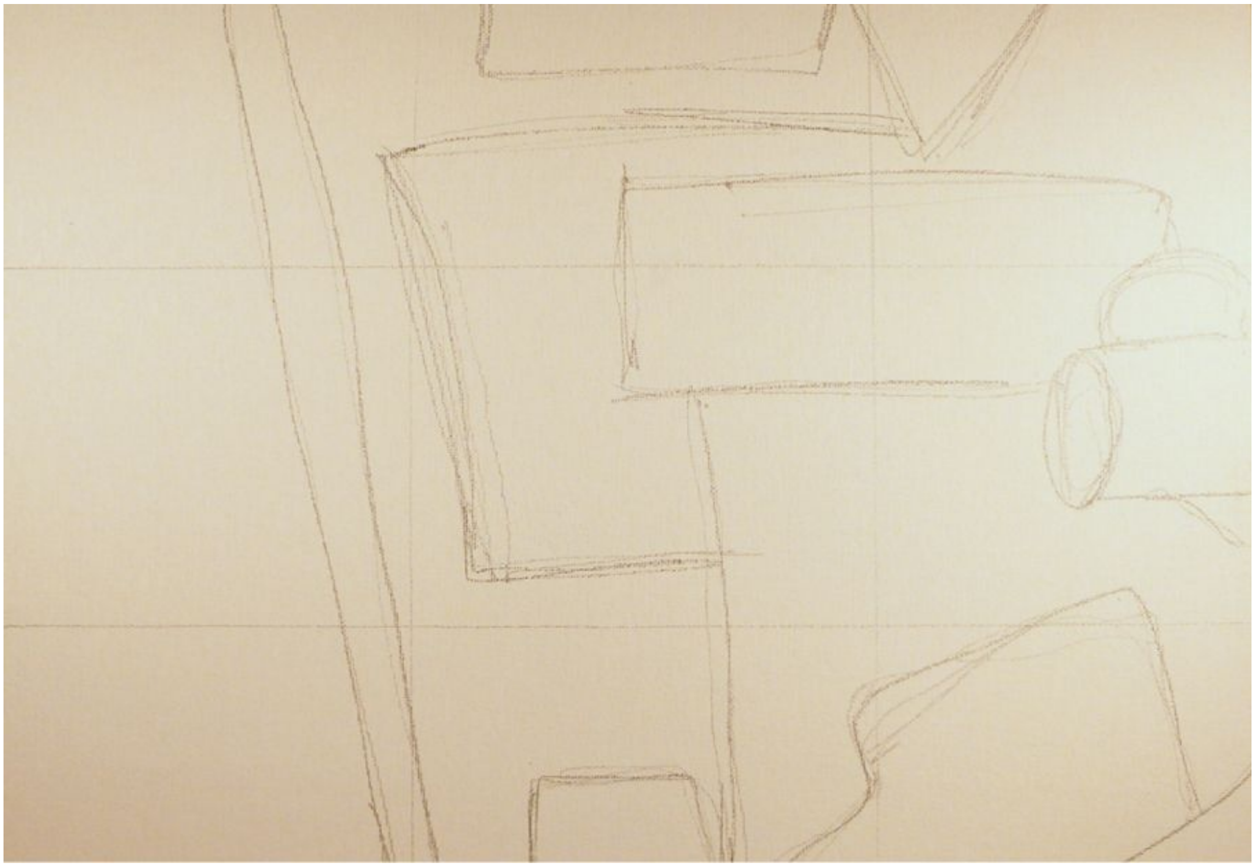
Starting with this wonderful painting of Stanley and his son Leo, I will abstract and simplify to create a balanced composition.

AFTER BREAKFAST

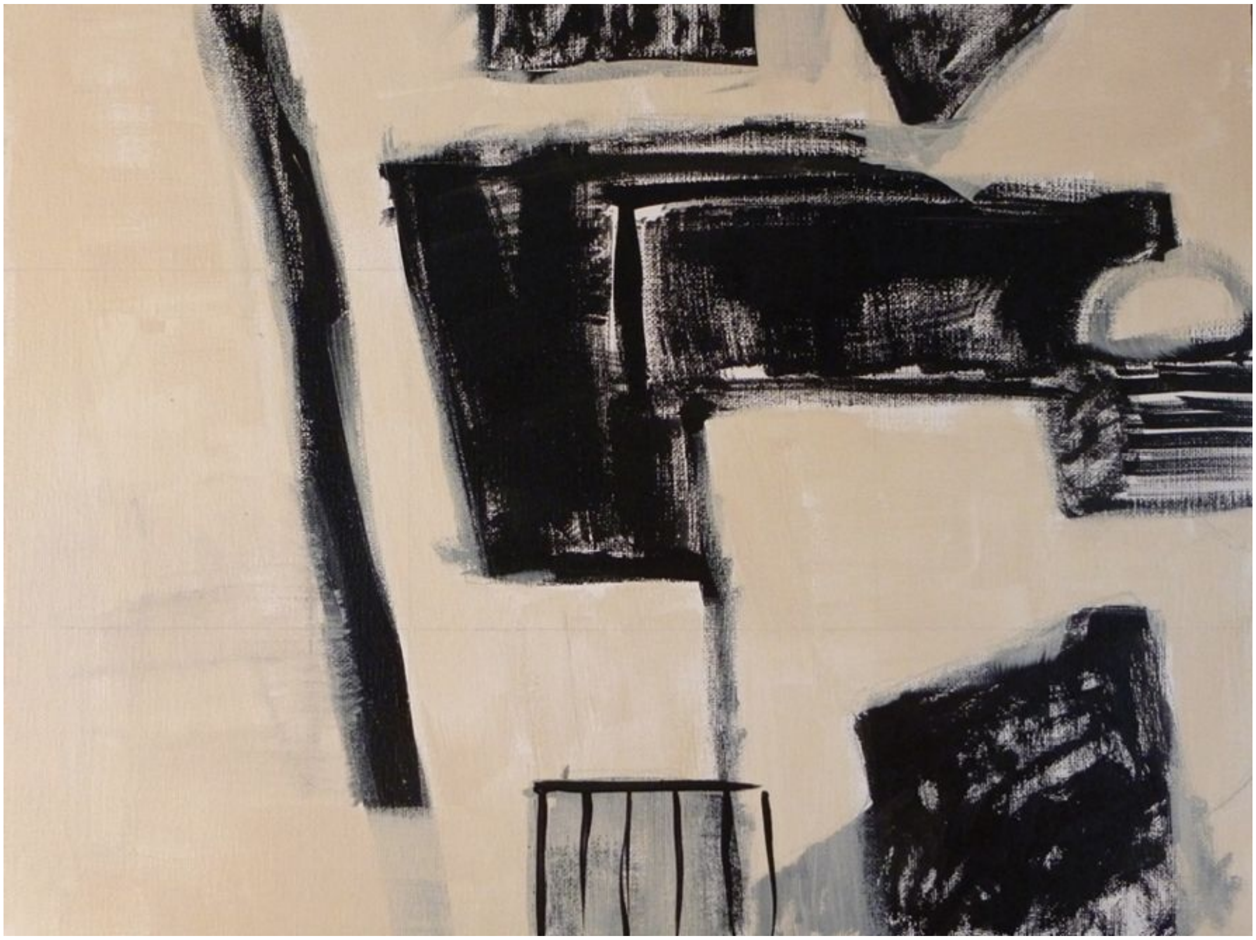
Stanley Goldstein
Oil on linen
42"× 57" (107cm × 145cm)



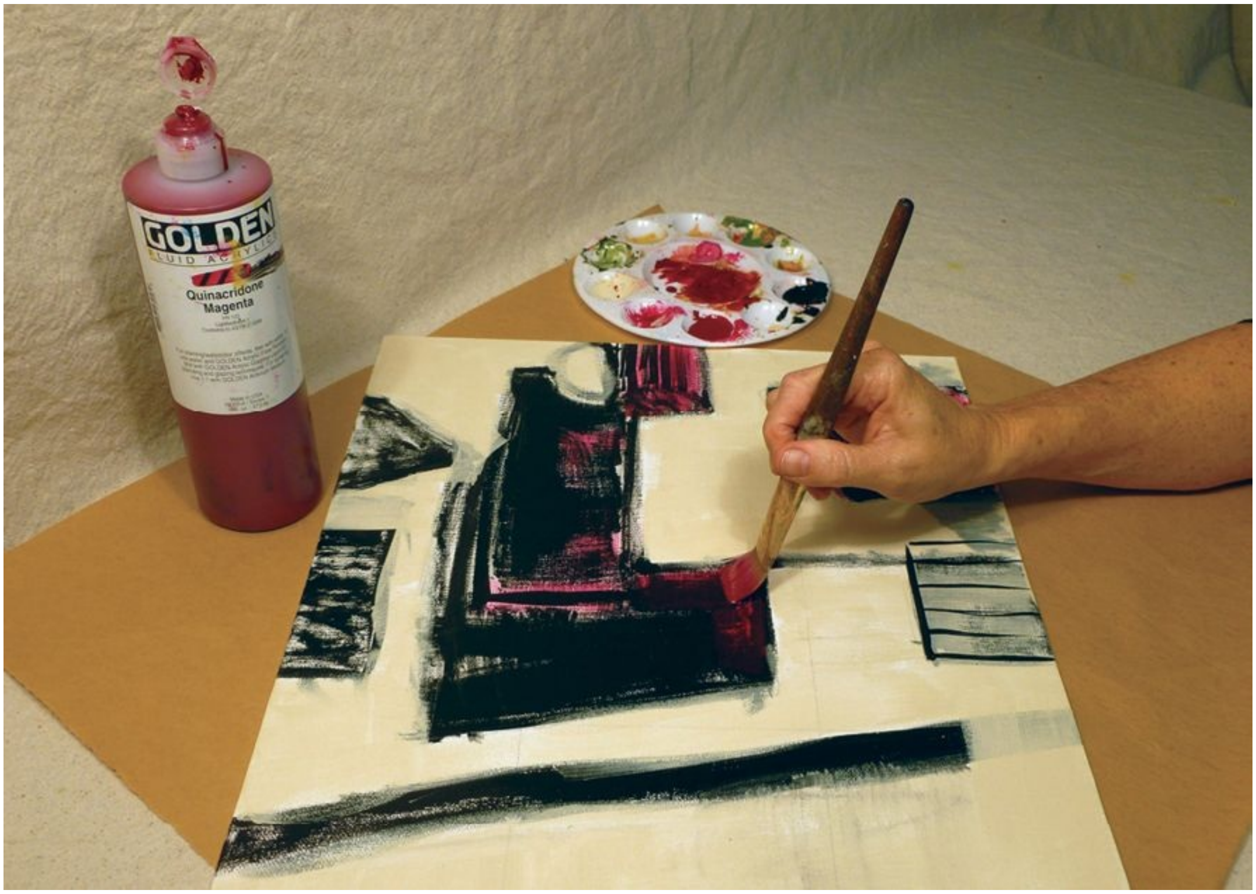
STEP 1 I’ve cropped in on the painting and rotated it 90 degrees to the left. It’s important to rotate the cropped painting so I am less likely to see real objects. Rotating the cropped painting immediately abstracts the scene.



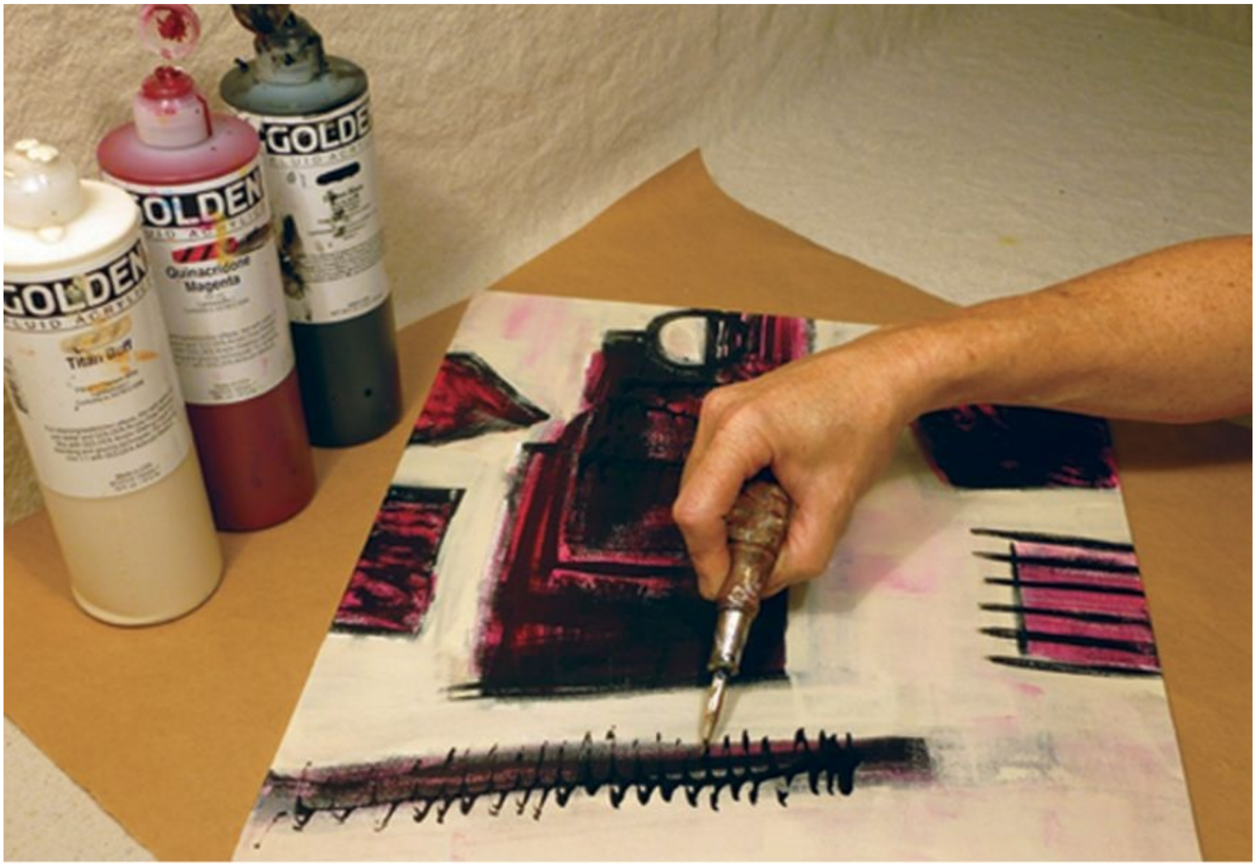
STEP 2 I’ve drawn the grid on my canvas and roughed in some shapes in pencil. I’m ready to start with just black and white paint.



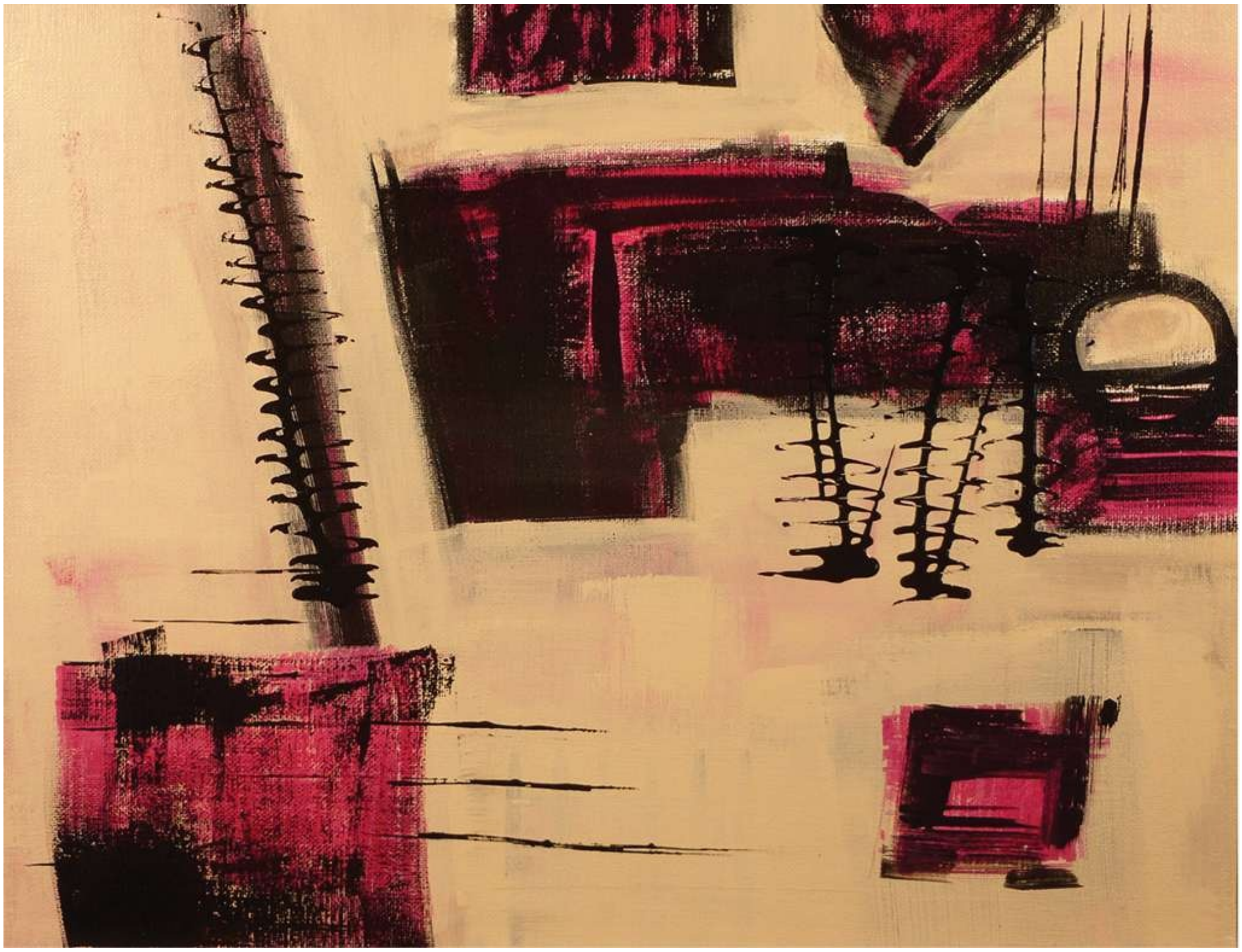
STEP 3 I’ve roughed in the main shapes in Carbon Black, greatly simplifying the complexity of the painting, and I let this layer dry.


GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Quinacridone
Magenta

STEP 4 I was careful to leave some of the white of the canvas showing through when I roughed in the black shapes. Now that the black shapes are dry, I can paint a thin layer of Quinacridone Magenta over the black. The Quinacridone Magenta will be a brilliant pink wherever the white of the canvas is showing.



STEP 5 Some texture was needed, so I dribbled a line of Carbon Black fluid and scratched through it with a screwdriver.



Here's the finished painting. You can see that I've made adjustments to the composition. The large squarish shape in the lower right-hand corner needed to be moved over to the left to balance the very strong diagonal line. I substituted a much smaller square and some horizontal lines to move the eye back to the right. This finished painting bears no resemblance at all to the painting by Stanley Goldstein, but it was inspired by his painting!

These are just some examples of how useful this technique can be. Look at the world around you. What moves you? How can you use what you see to create paintings that are both meaningful and exciting, yet not bogged down with unnecessary detail? Remember, less is more!

MAKING A VIEWFINDER

First decide what dimension your viewfinder is going to be. If you are working on a square canvas, your viewfinder should be square. If your canvas is a rectangle, you need a rectangular viewfinder in the correct proportion. Not all rectangles are created equal! A little math helps here.

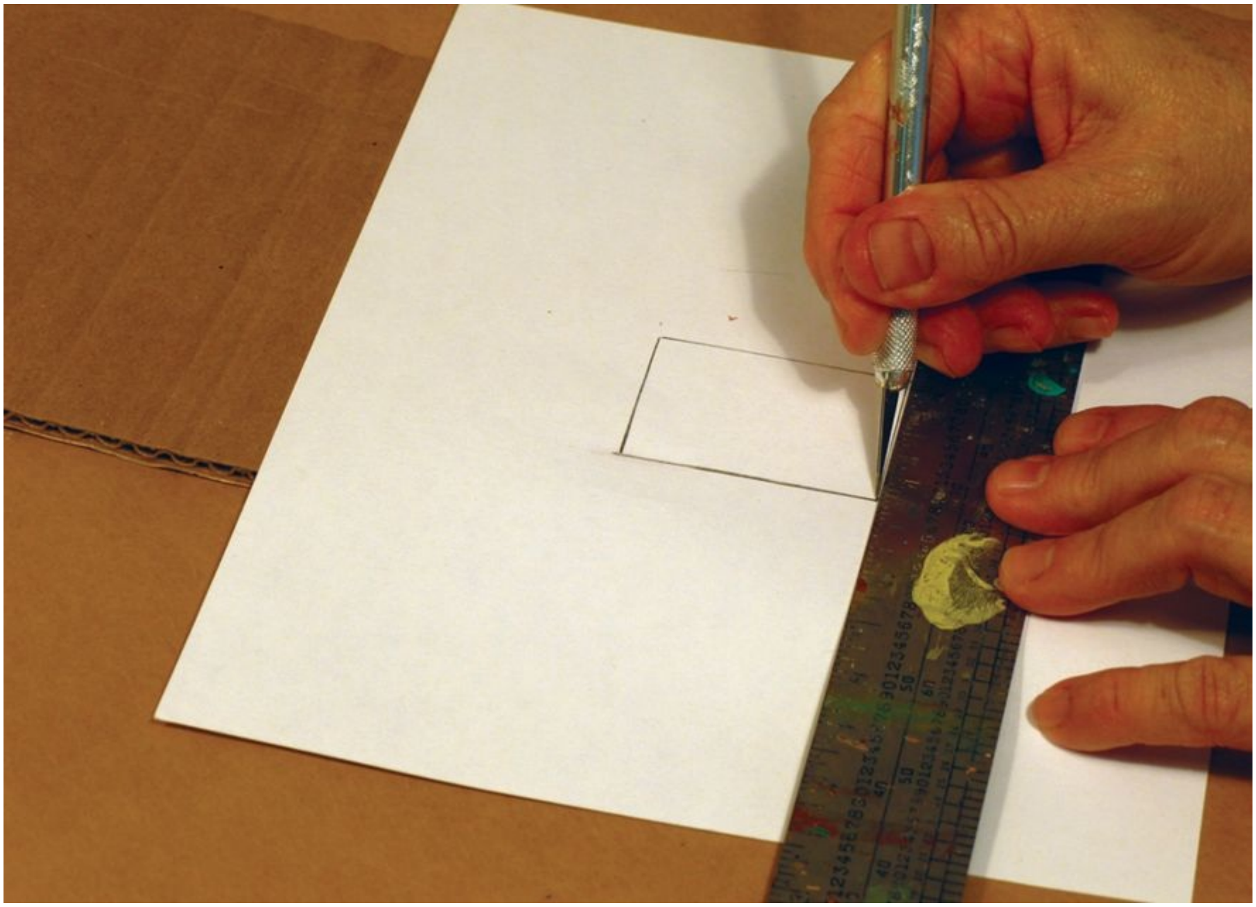
If you are using a rectangular canvas that is a 3:4 ratio, simply make a viewfinder that is 1½” × 2" (4cm × 5cm), which is 3:4 reduced by half.

To get the final viewfinder measurement for any canvas, first find the lowest common denominator for the dimensions of the canvas. For instance, a canvas that is 18 × 24 can be divided by 6 to get 3 and 4 (18 divided by 6 is 3, 24 divided by 6 is 4), so your ratio is still 3:4.

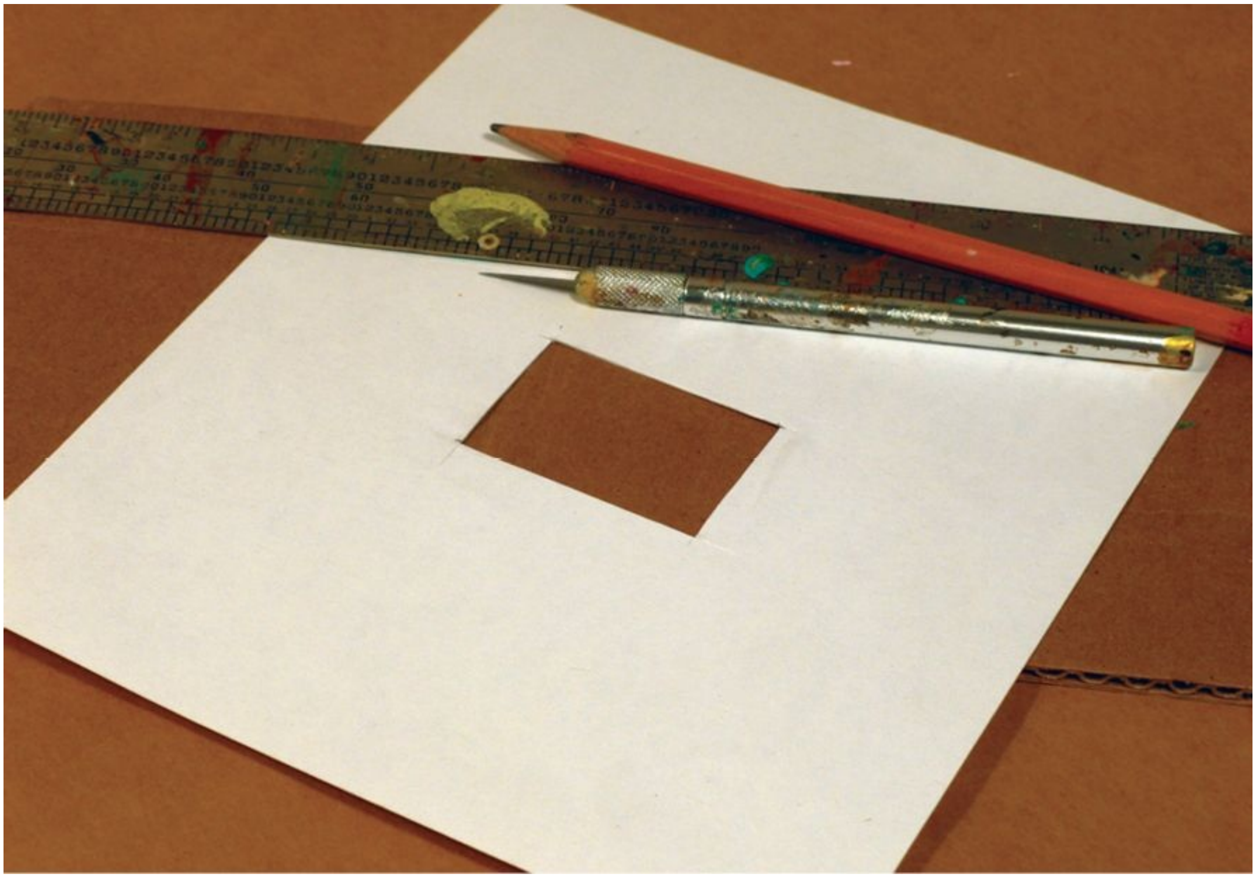
A canvas that is 24 × 30 can be divided by 6 to get a 4:5 ratio, and so on. Once you get that ratio, divide it again by 2. A 3:4 ratio ends up being 1½:2. Your viewfinder should be 1½” × 2" (4cm × 5cm) for any canvas with a 3:4 ratio. For a canvas with a 4:5 ratio your viewfinder should be 2" × 2½”(5cm × 6cm).

Also take into account the complexity of the image you are working from. In some cases you will need to use a larger viewfinder if the image you’re working from has less detail.

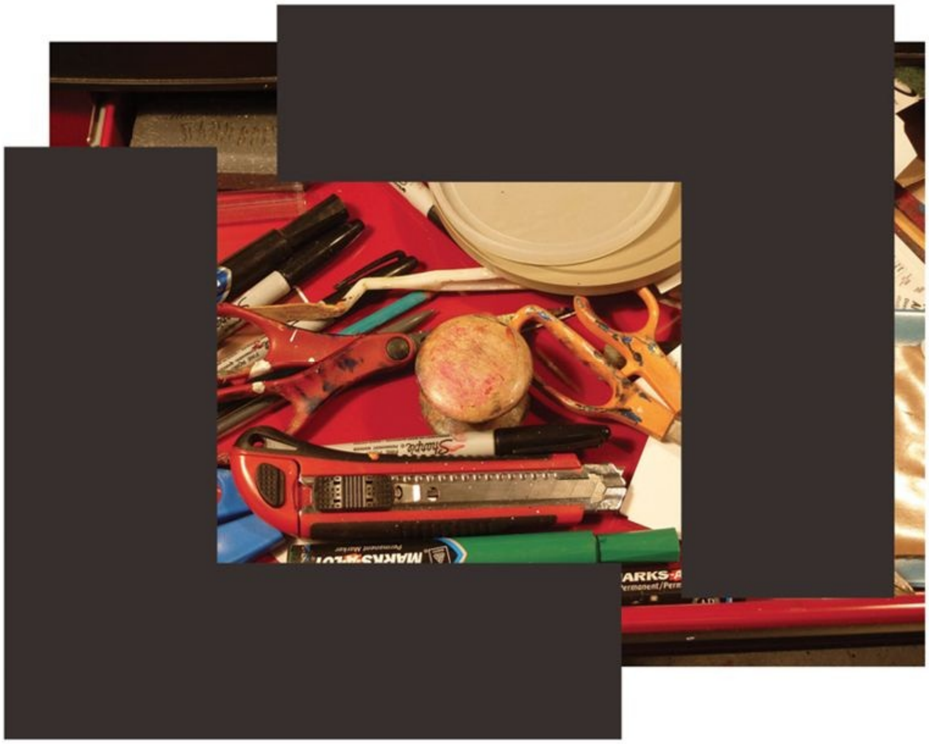
Remember, you are only using the source image for inspiration. Our goal is not to copy it but to be inspired by it, re-creating another artwork that interprets the original.



STEP 1 Use a clean white piece of bristol board or watercolor paper to make the viewfinder. Measure the area with a ruler and draw it out using a light pencil line.



STEP 2 Using a sharp knife, cut the window out of the paper revealing your viewfinder.



STEP 3 You can also create simple cropping bars from two pieces of paper or board. These can be used for a variety of sizes.

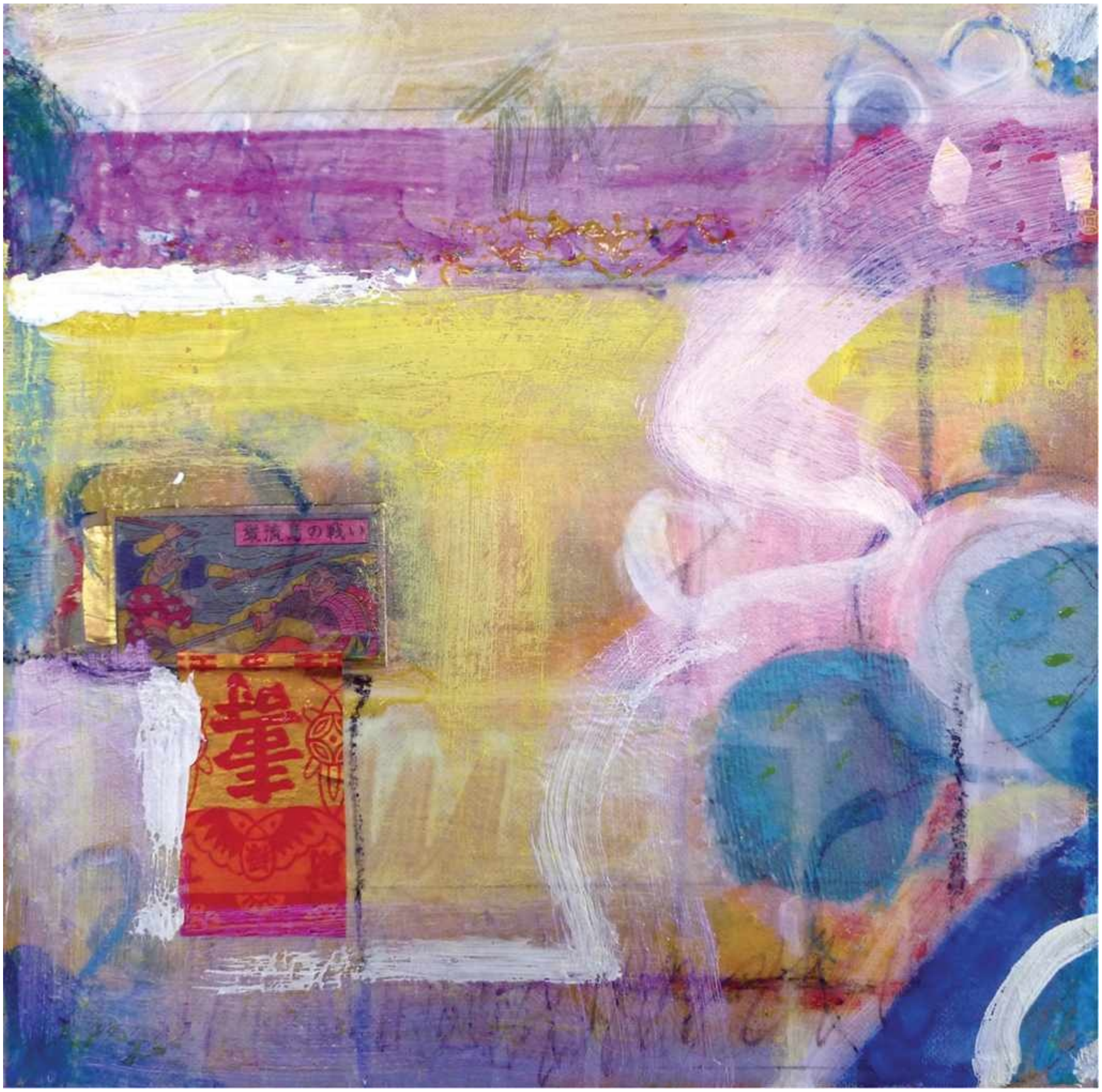
EXPLORATION NINE

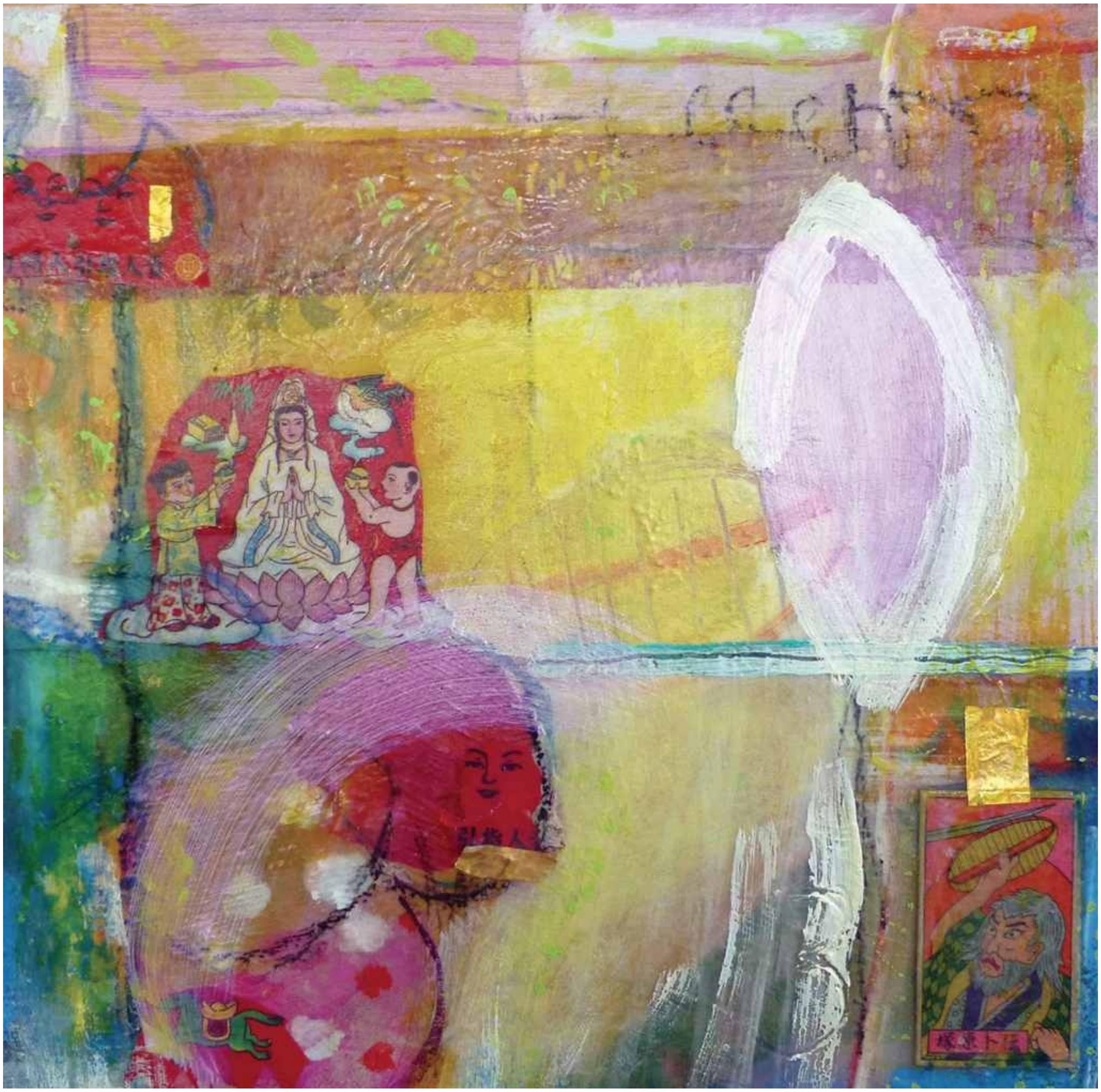
Mixed-Media Madness

One of the purposes of this book is to give you license to create art with whatever you have lying around. It's not necessary to have all the latest art supplies or fancy brushes to make art. Jackson Pollock painted with sticks and house paint. Robert Rauschenberg made collages out of trash. Betye Saar makes amazing collages with broken jewelry, old postcards and other cast-offs.

Here we'll explore some techniques that use some everyday items combined with acrylic paints and gels to get some unusual results.

"The days you work are the best days." —Georgia O'Keeffe


巌流島の戦い
壽



My dear friend Ruth Brophy is a master at mixed media. She layers interesting papers, drawing mediums, acrylic paints, other mediums and gels, and makes it look effortless.

ANGELS AND DEMONS 2 AND 3

Ruth Brophy

Mixed media on canvas 14" × 14" (36cm × 36cm)

Brown Paper Bags

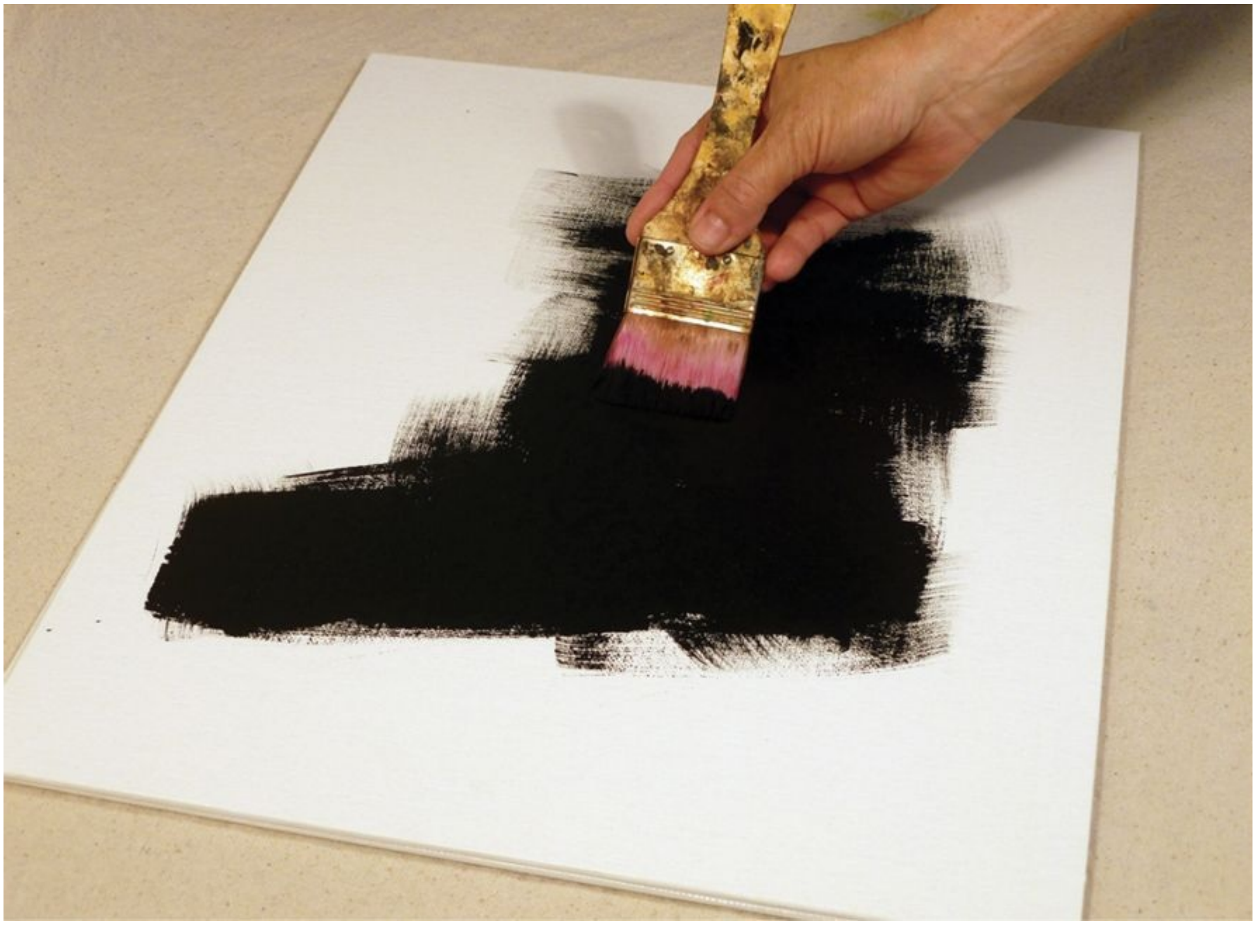
The list of artists who use everyday materials is long and varied. I especially love the Reverend Howard Finster, who created art on everything from the lid of a potted meat can to recycled wood to an entire garden of art. It makes a brown paper bag seem almost upscale by comparison! So the next time you're eyeing that crushed-up can in the parking lot and thinking, "What could I possibly do with that?" know that you're in good company. Now, grab a couple of brown paper bags and let's get to work!

What You Need

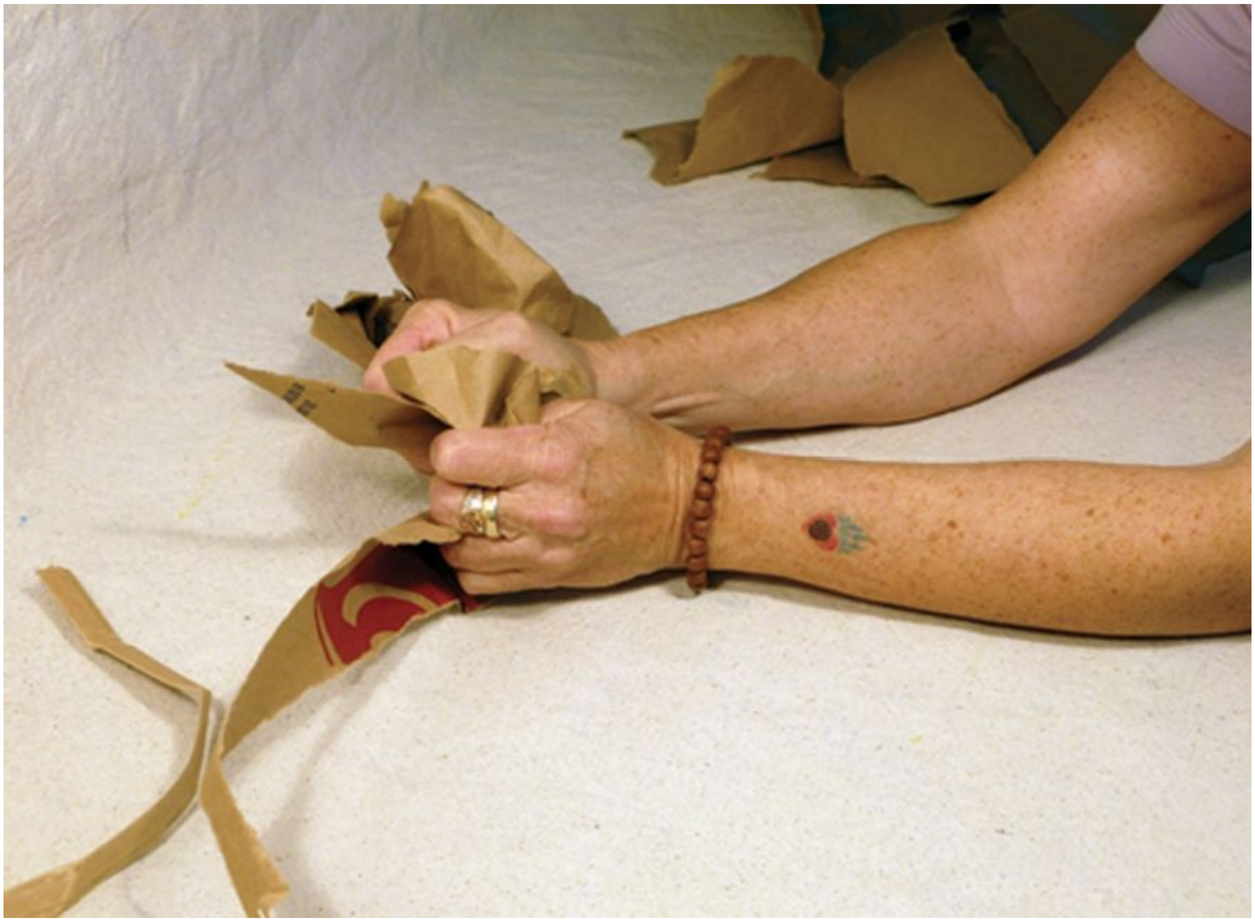
Setup time: 10–5 minutes Painting time: 20–60 minutes 3" (76mm) flat nylon brush 18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm) canvas or canvas board Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Carbon Black
- Quinacridone Magenta

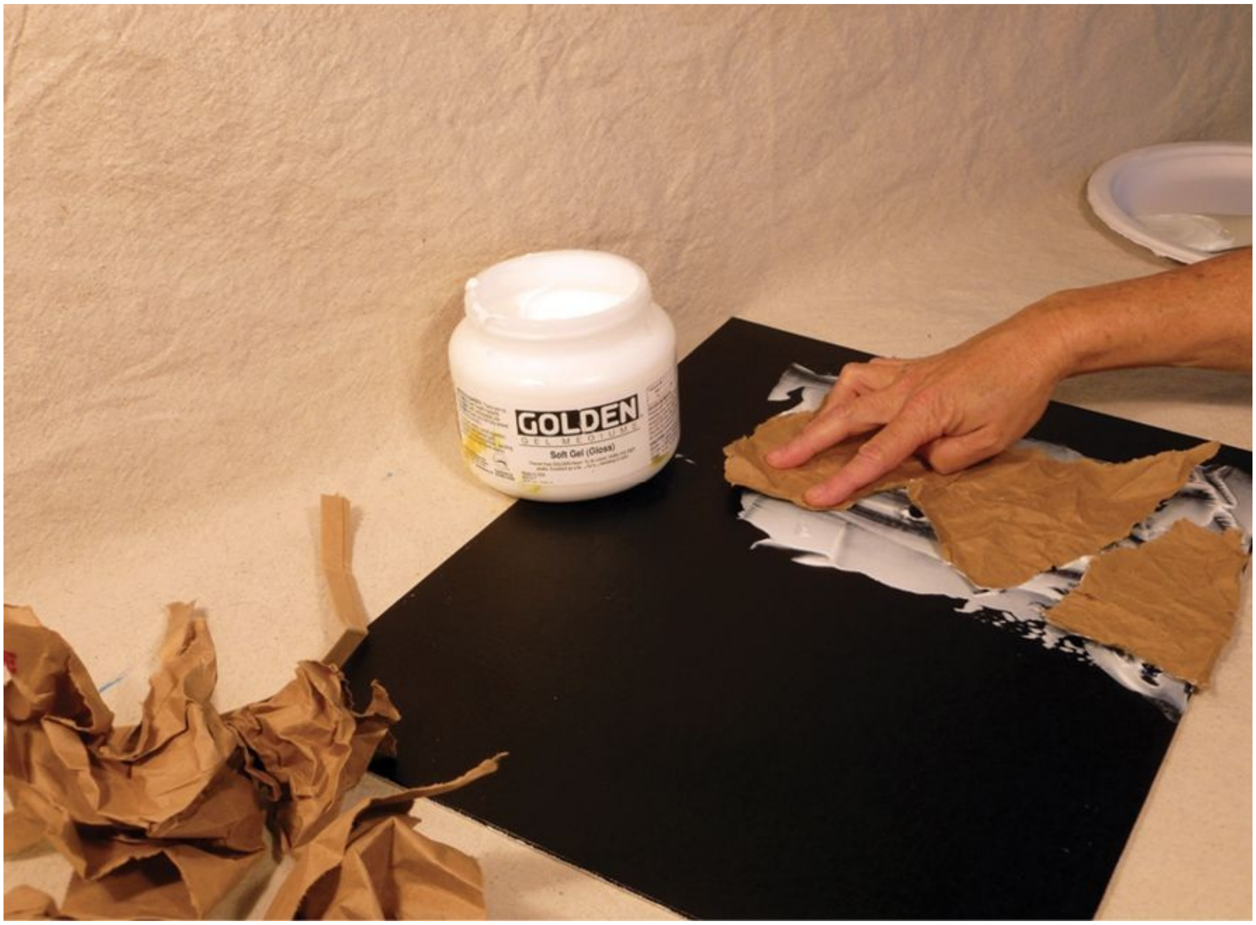
large brown paper bags, 2
Heavy Body Titanium White palette knife
palette or palette paper paper towels
plastic fork, stick, screwdriver or other implement polymer medium gloss
gloss gel
spatula or Catalyst Blade (old credit cards work fine) water container



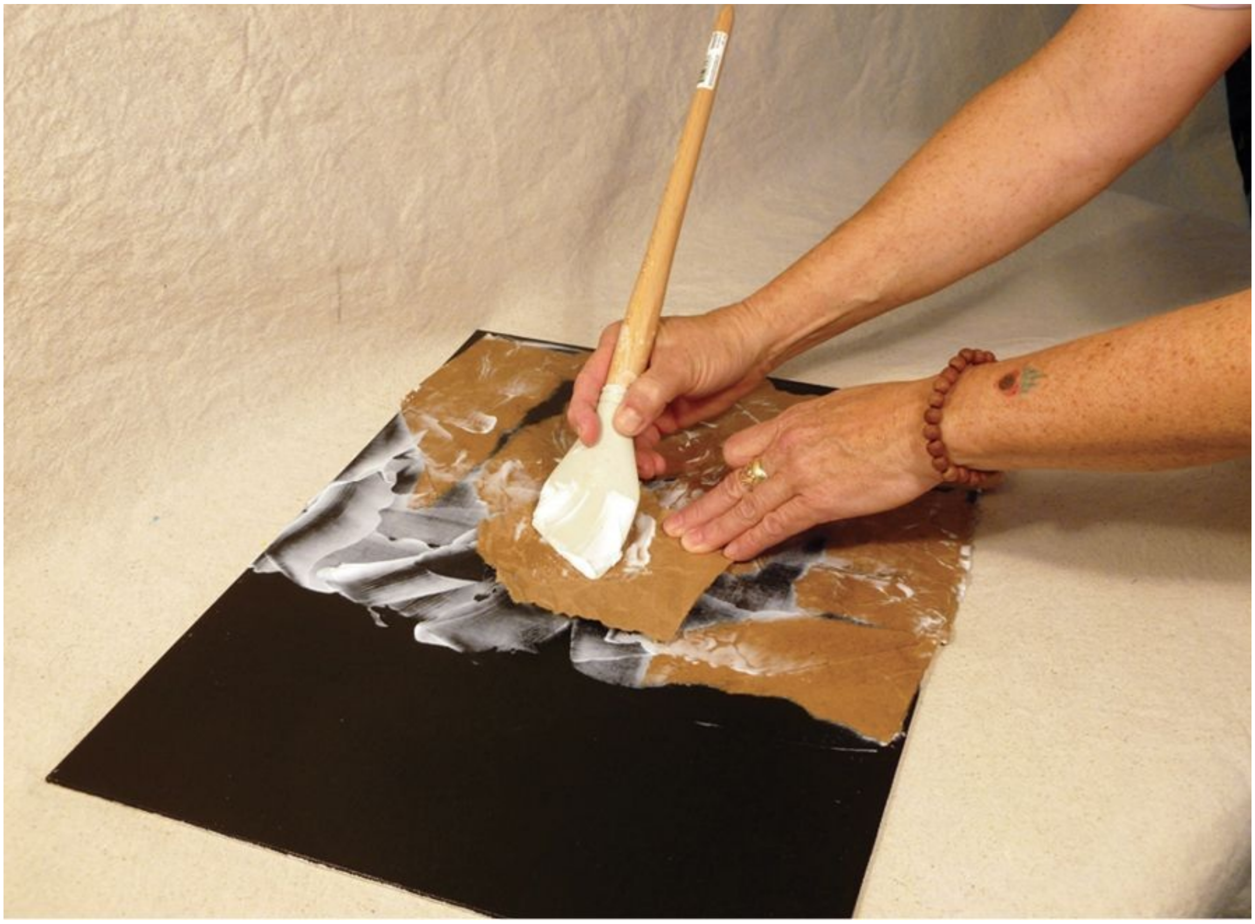
STEP 1 Cover the canvas with a thin layer of fluid Carbon Black and let it dry.



STEP 2 Tear up a large brown paper bag into several different-sized pieces and crunch them up.


GOLDEN
GEL MEDIUMS
Soft Gel (Gloss)

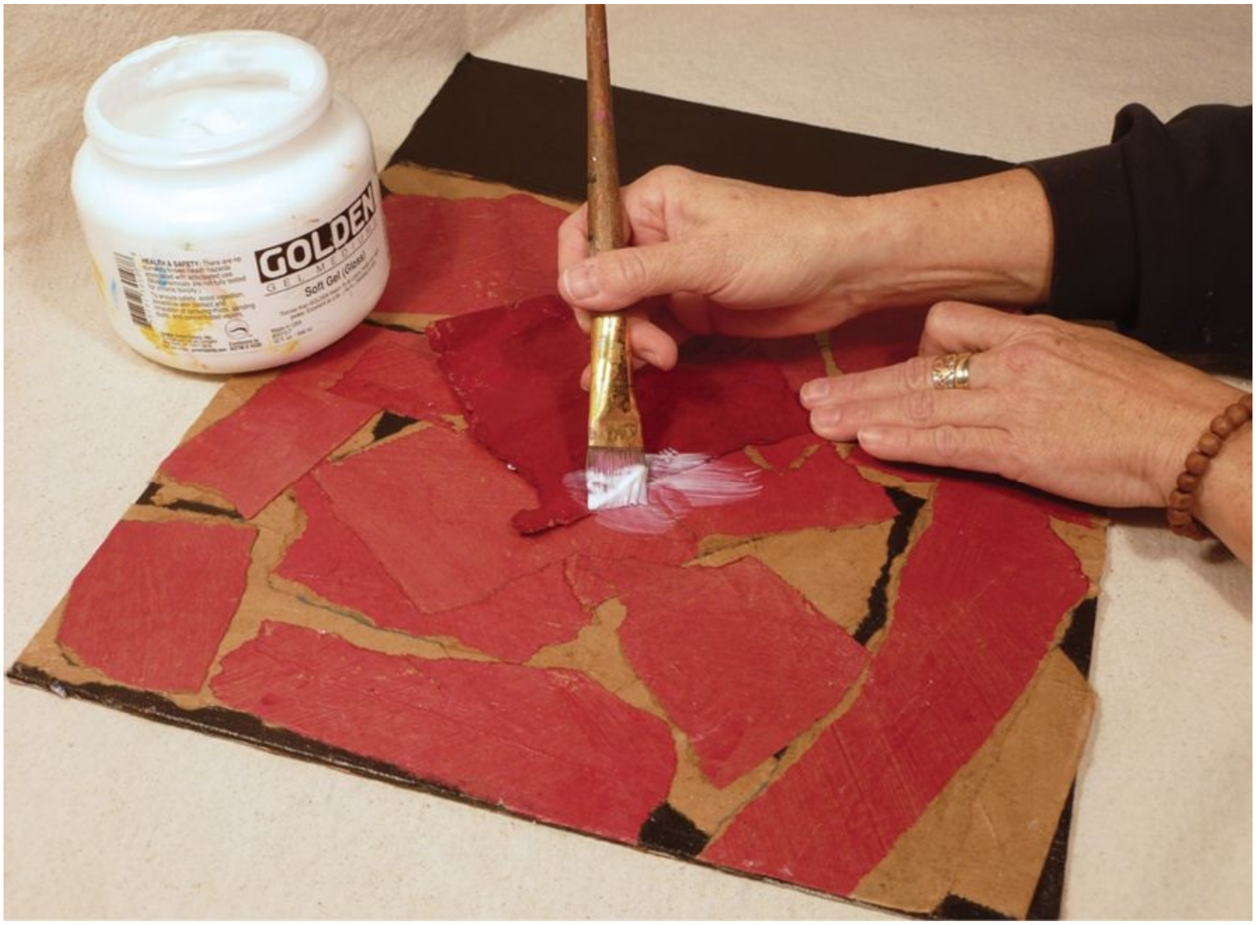
STEP 3 Lay down a liberal layer of gloss gel and adhere the pieces of brown paper, allowing some of the black background to show through. Don’t collage anything to the top one-third of the canvas.



STEP 4 Use a spatula, old credit card or a Catalyst Blade to press the paper down to get a good bond. Push air bubbles out with the tool as well. For better adhesion, cover the entire brown paper section of the canvas with another layer of gloss gel, pressing down hard with the spatula to get a good bond, working out air bubbles as you go. Let this layer dry thoroughly.

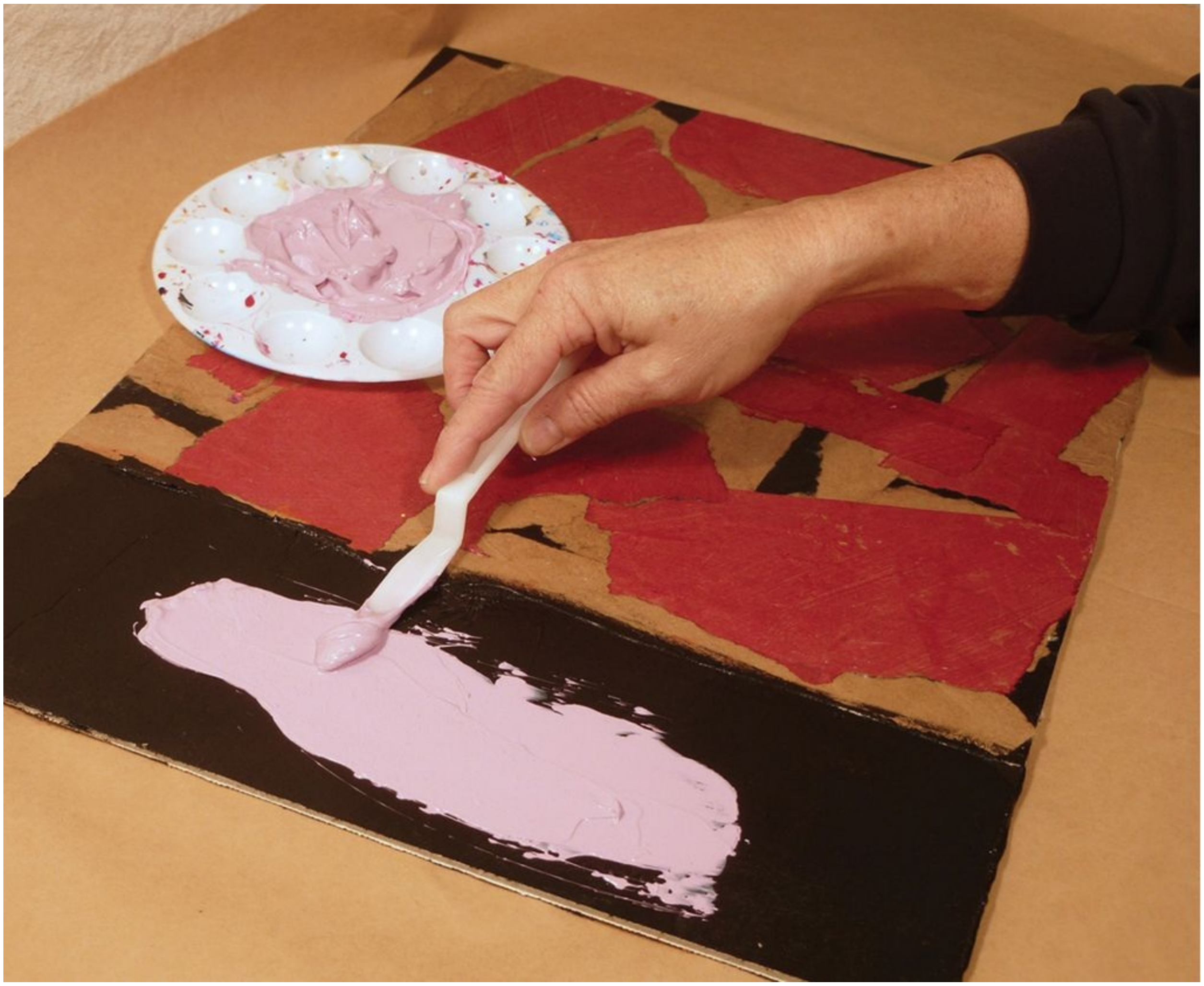
GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Quinacridone
Magenta

STEP 5 Tear another brown paper bag into different sizes and shapes. Make a mixture of transparent color by mixing Quinacridone Magenta into polymer medium gloss in a ratio of about 1:10.

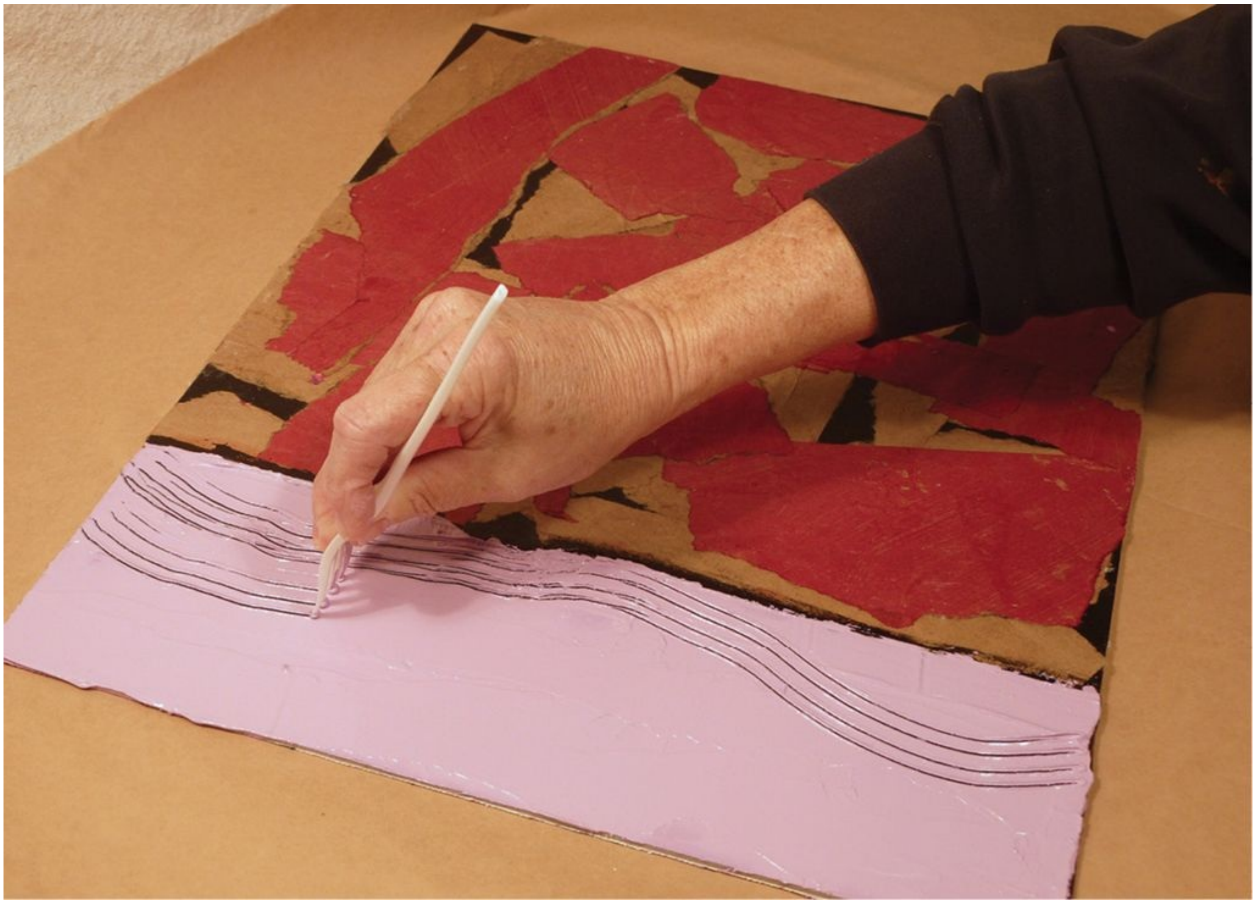

GOLDEN
GEL MEDIUMS
Soft Gel (Gloss)

STEP 6 Paint several pieces of the brown paper bag with the transparent Quinacridone Magenta mixture and let them dry. Glue them down onto the first layer with gloss gel as above.

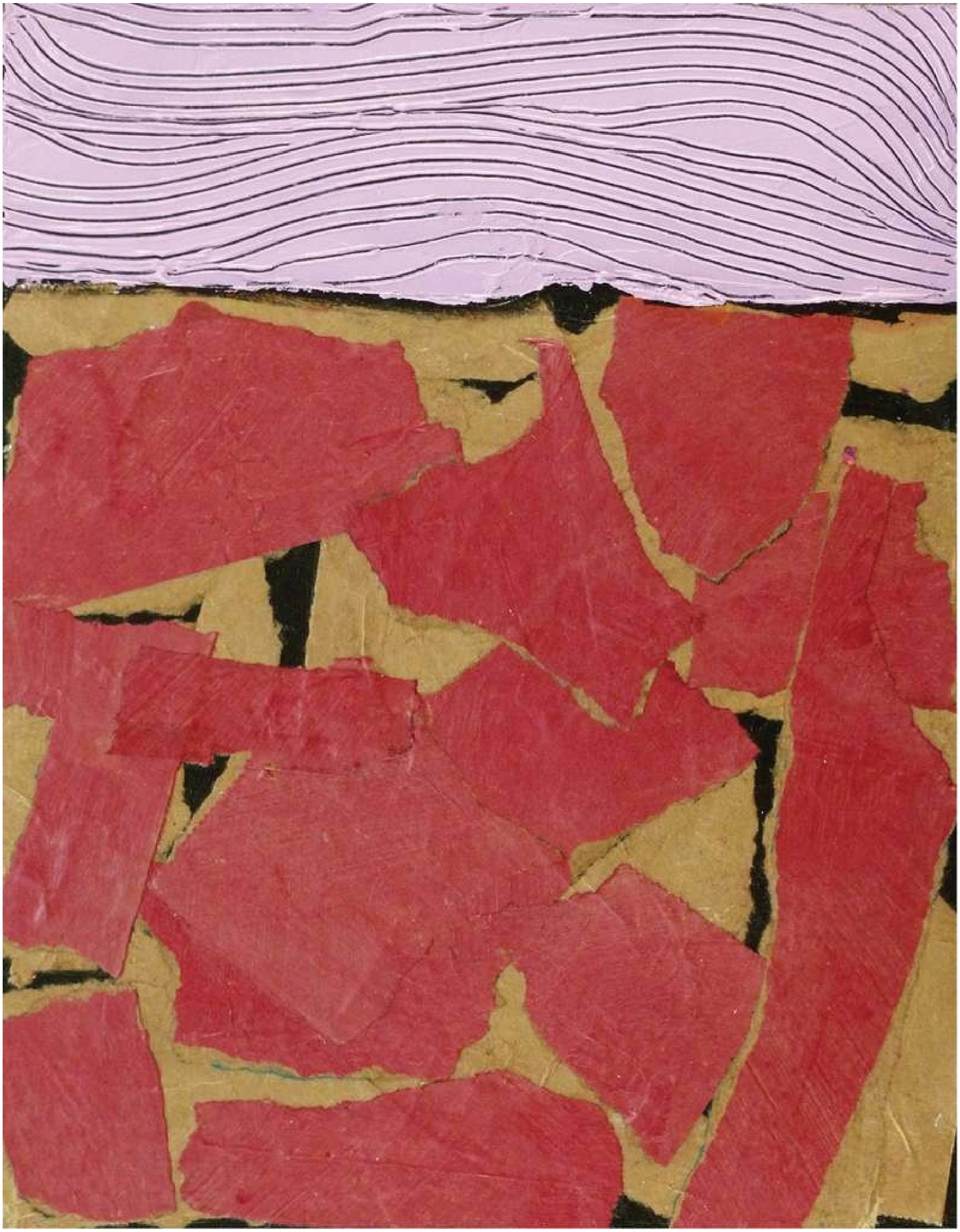
STEP 7 Make a bright pink mixture by adding one part Quinacridone Magenta to ten parts of Heavy Body Titanium White. Mute this mixture slightly by adding a couple drops of Carbon Black. Mix well.



STEP 8 Apply the muted pink mixture fairly thick to the top one-third of the canvas with a palette knife.



STEP 9 While the pink mixture is still wet, drag designs through it with a plastic fork, a Catalyst tool, a stick, a screwdriver or any other implement you like.



Here's the finished piece. What a great way to recycle brown paper bags!

Aluminum Foil

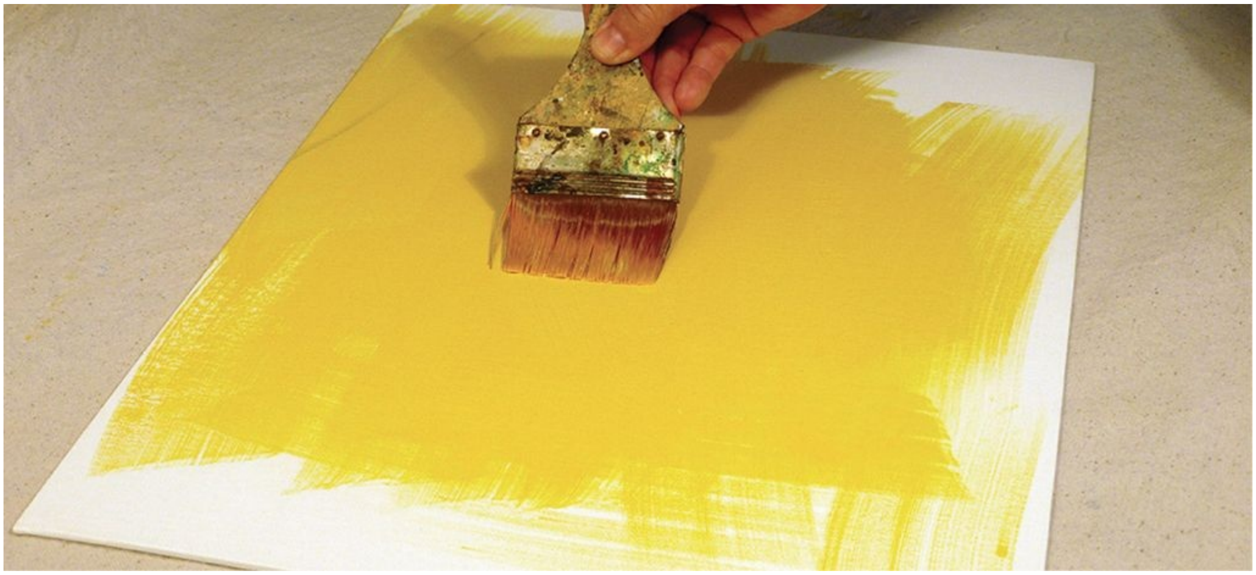
A little shine never hurts and what could be easier than using that spare roll of aluminum foil that’s in the kitchen drawer?

What You Need

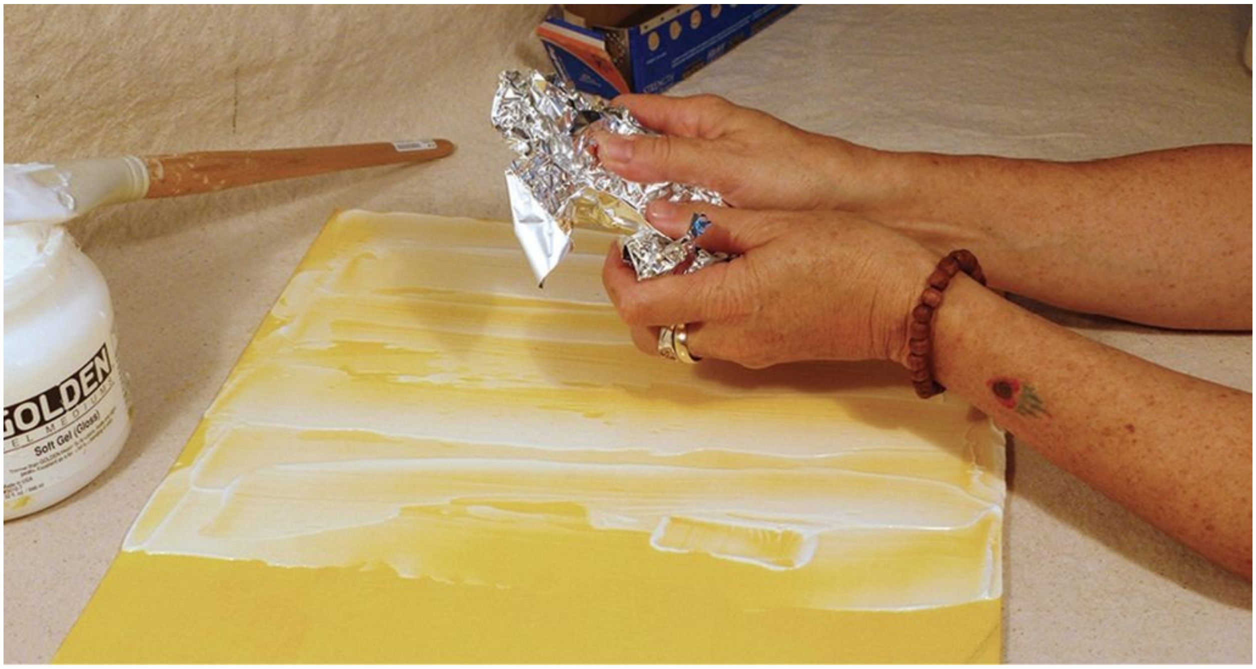
Setup time: 10–15 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes
18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm) canvas or canvas board Golden Fluid Acrylics

- Hansa Yellow Medium
- Quinacridone Magenta
- Phthalo Blue (Green Shade)

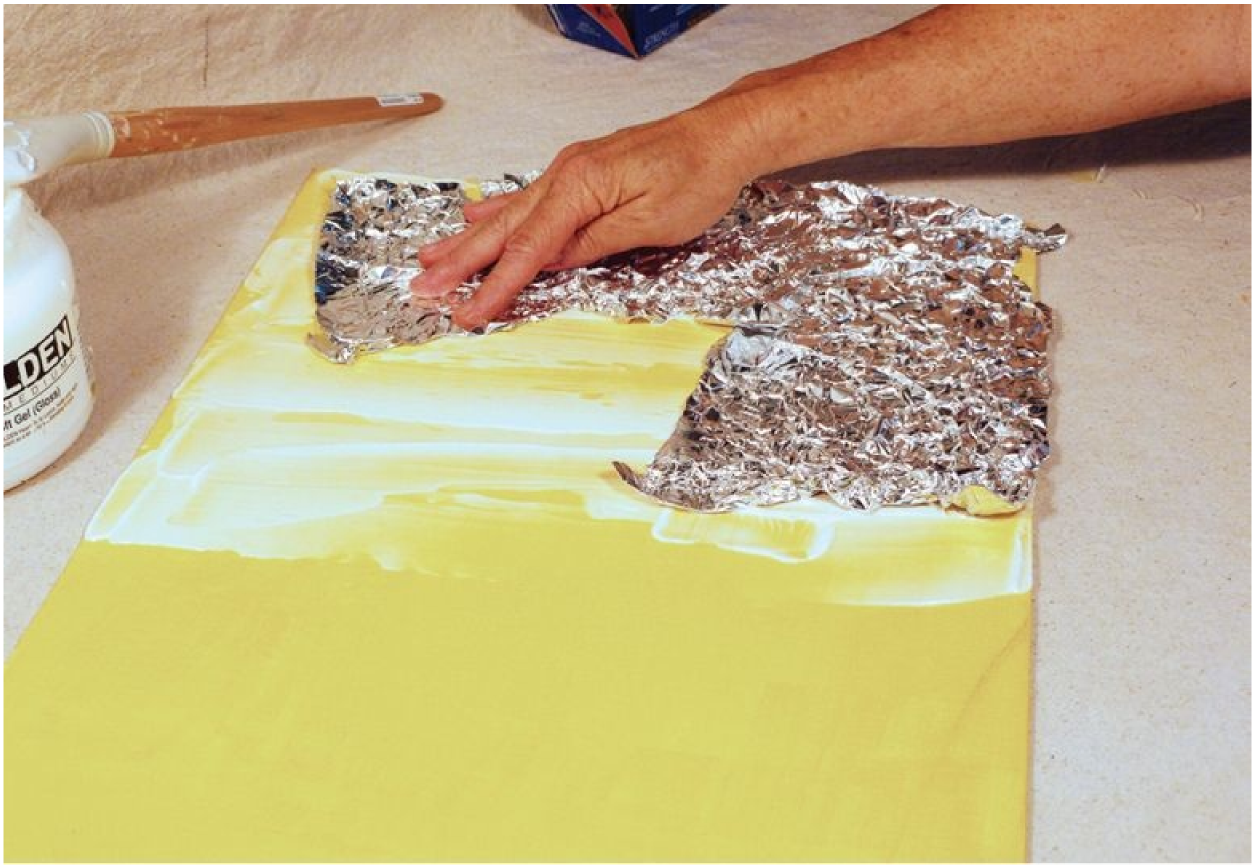
3" (76mm) flat nylon brush
roll of aluminum foil
palette or palette paper
gloss medium
gloss gel
water container
paper towels
spatula or Catalyst Blade (old credit cards work fine) old drawing, monoprint, wrapping paper, greeting card, *etc.*
pencil, oil pastel or wax crayon



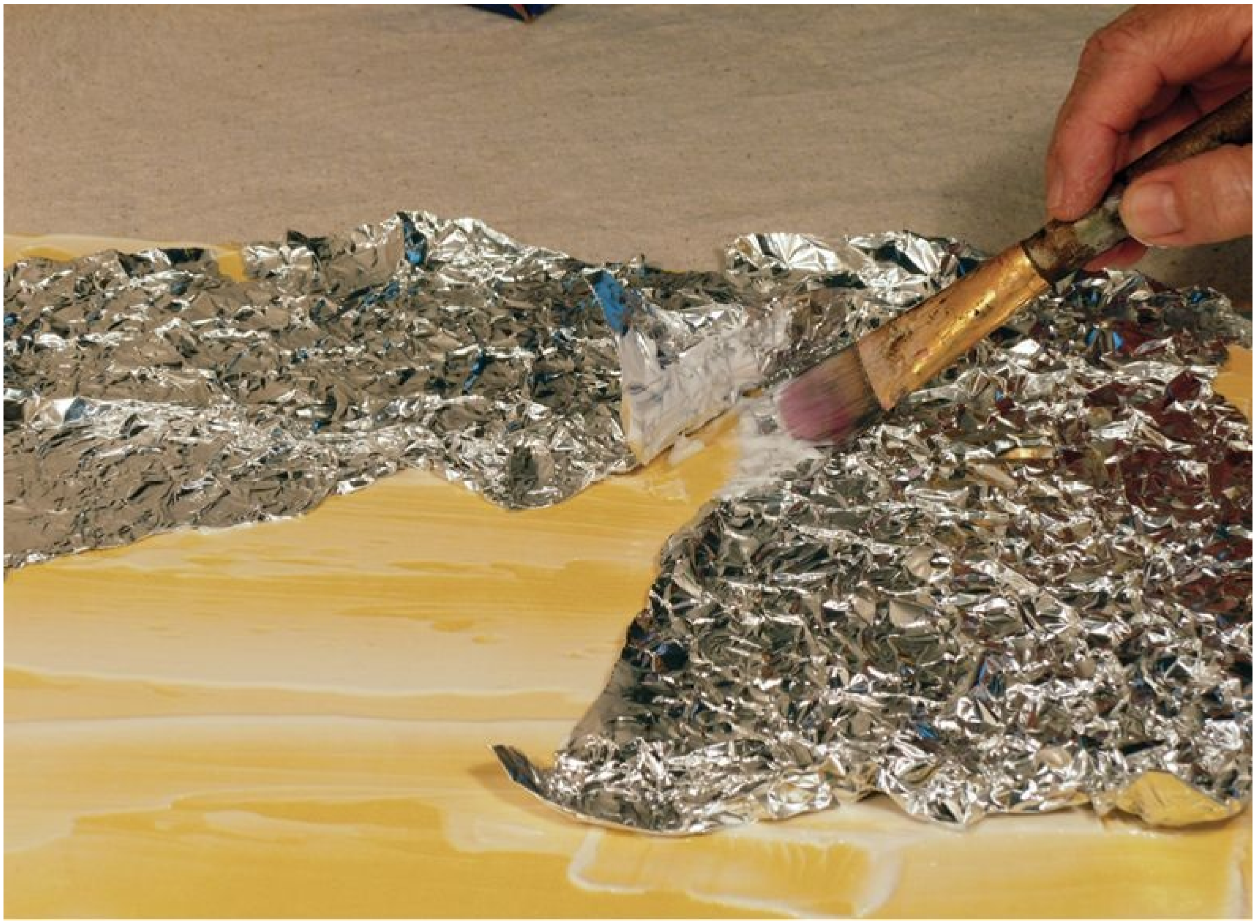
STEP 1 Cover the canvas board with a thin layer of fluid Hansa Yellow Medium and set aside to dry.


GOLDEN
GEL MEDIUMS
Soft Gel (Gloss)

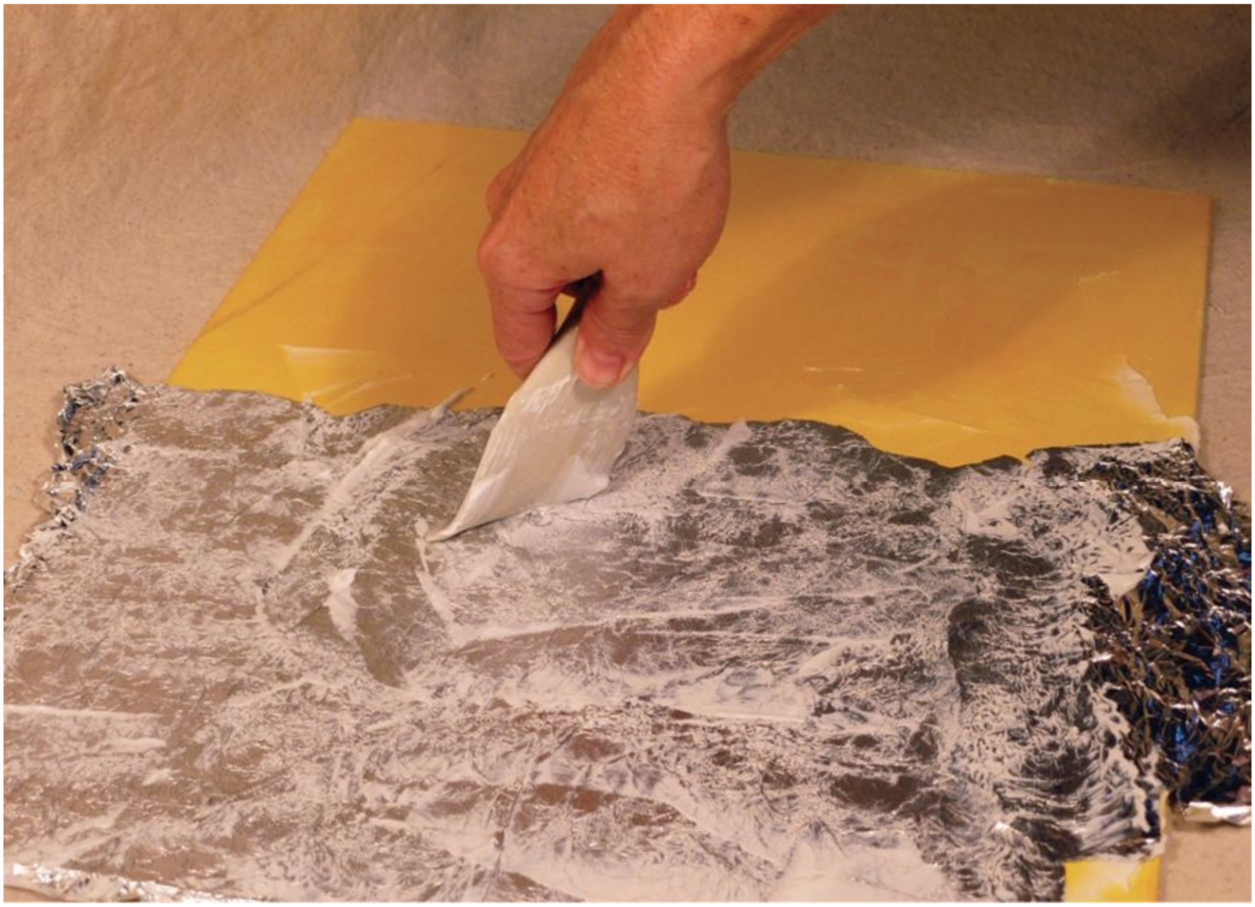
STEP 2 Tear off several pieces of aluminum foil and scrunch them up slightly.



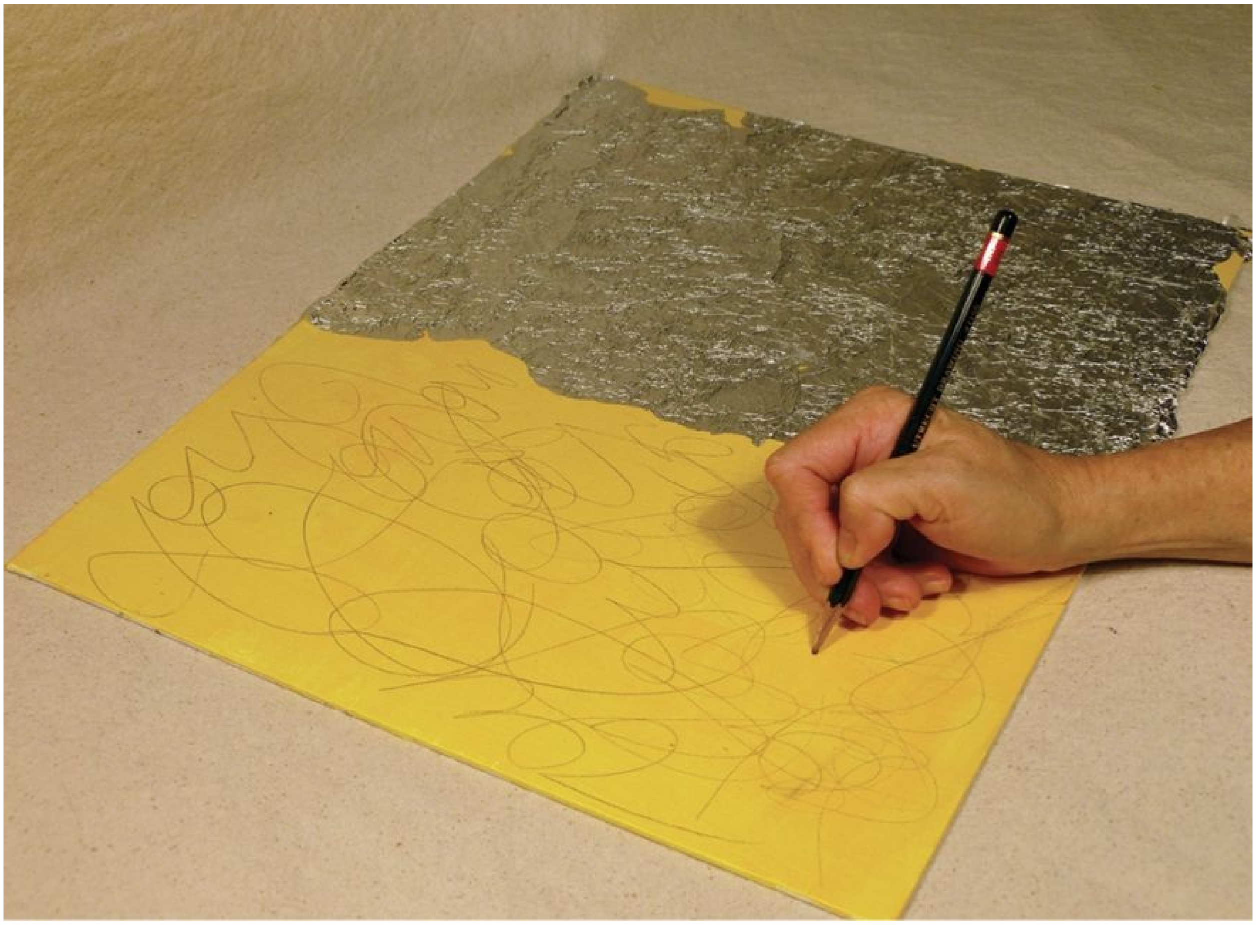
STEP 3 Cover the bottom half of the canvas board with a generous layer of gloss gel. Lay out the aluminum foil onto the canvas board, pushing it into the wet gel.



STEP 4 Be sure to put gloss gel between any overlapping pieces of aluminum foil so a good bond is formed.

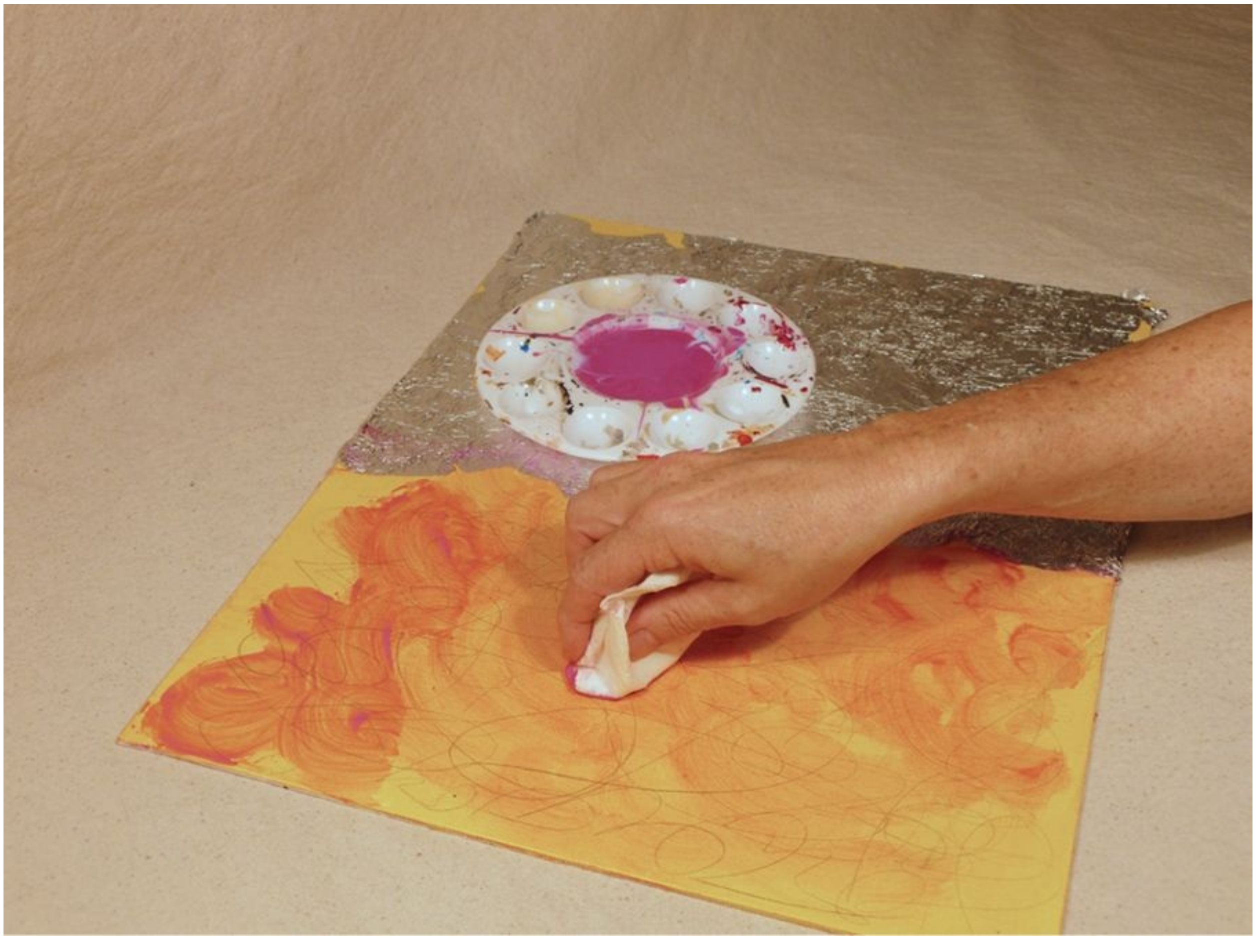


STEP 5 Using a Catalyst tool, an old credit card or a spatula, push all of the excess gloss gel out and make sure that the aluminum has bonded well to the canvas board. Let dry thoroughly.



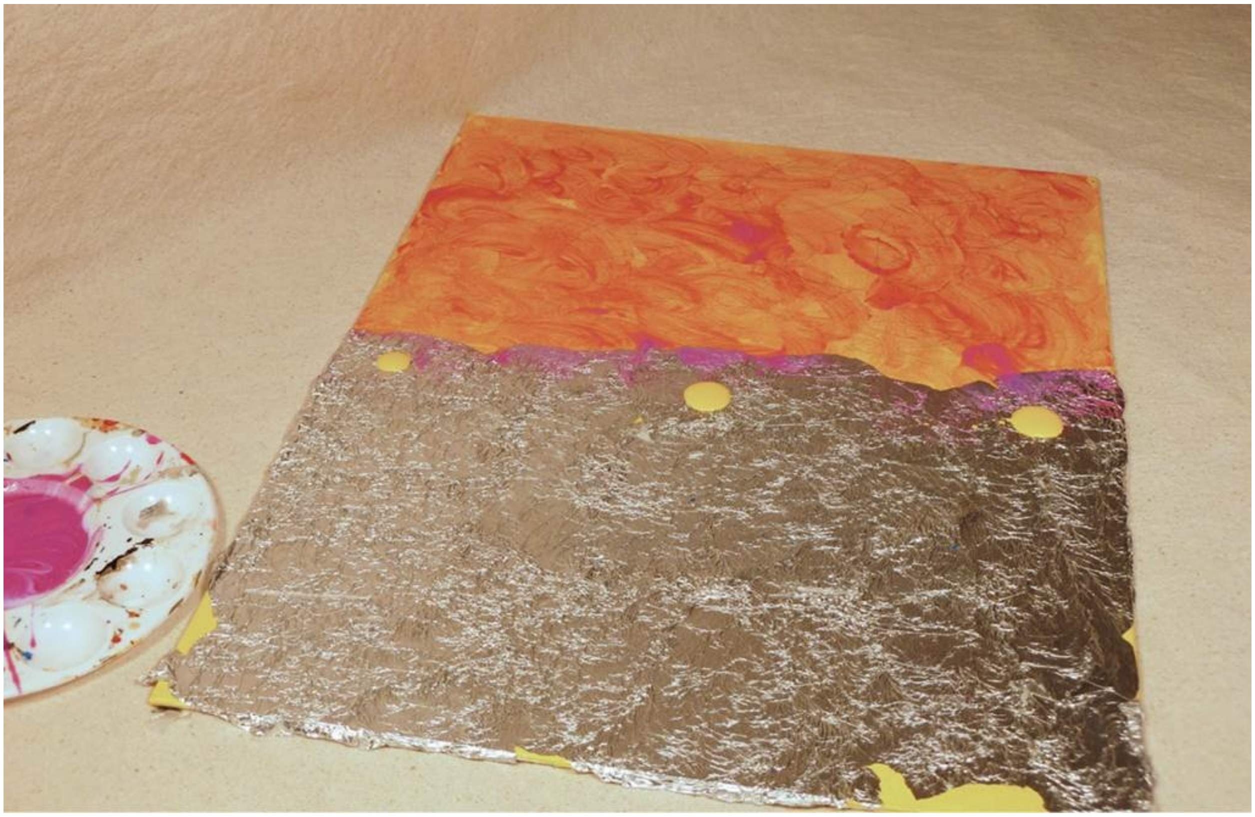
STEP 6 Using a pencil, an oil pastel or a wax crayon, write words into the top half of the canvas board.

STEP 7 Make a thin transparent glaze by mixing fluid Quinacridone Magenta into gloss medium in a ratio of 1:10.

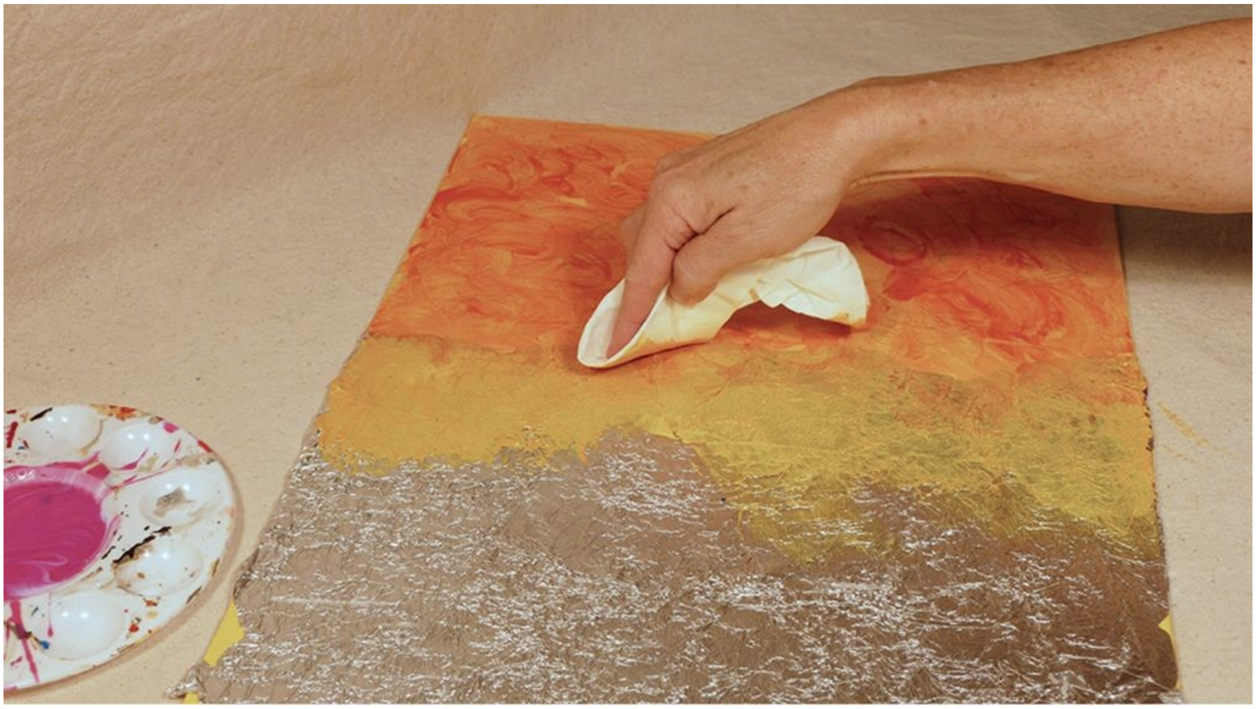


STEP 8 Using a paper towel, cover the top third with the thin Quinacridone Magenta mixture using a swirling motion. Let it dry. (When you’re finished with the paper towel, lay it out to dry. Use it for the Paper

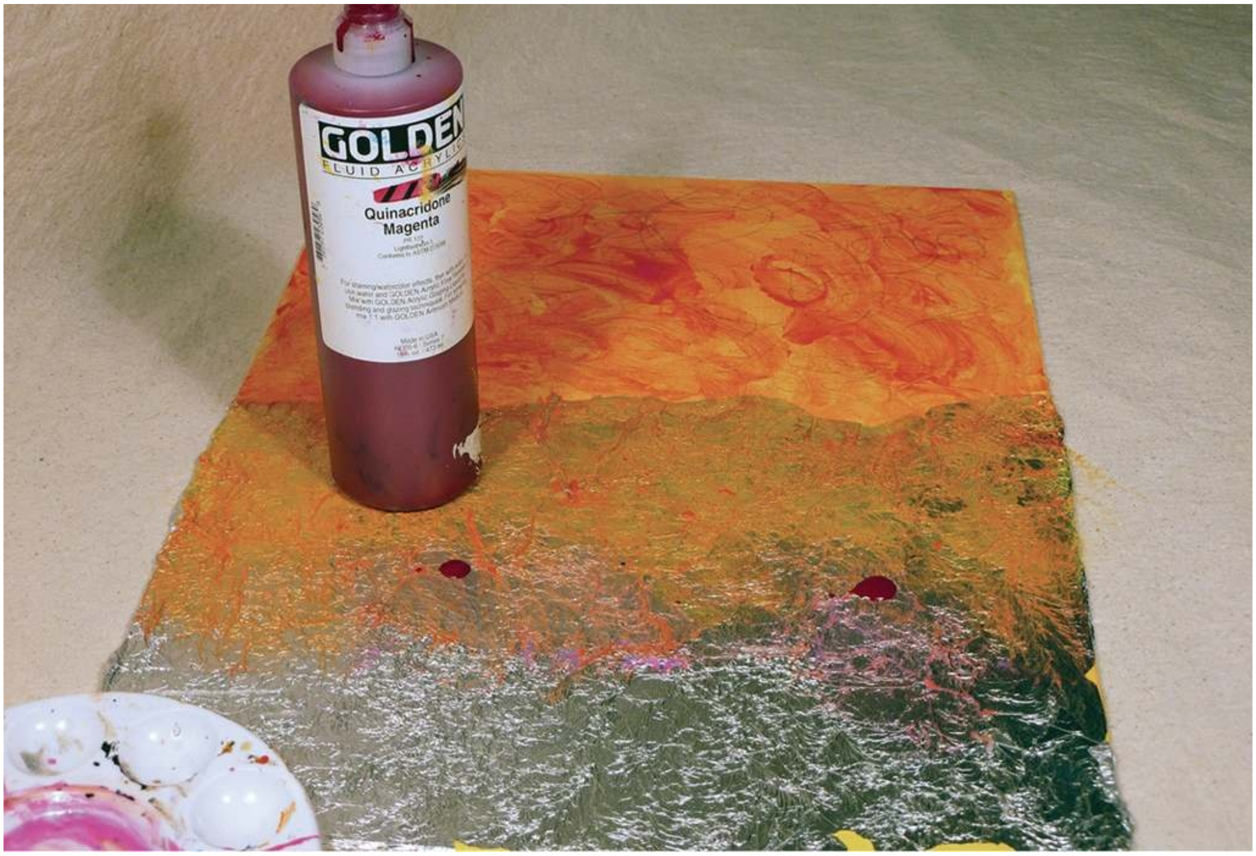
Towel exploration.)



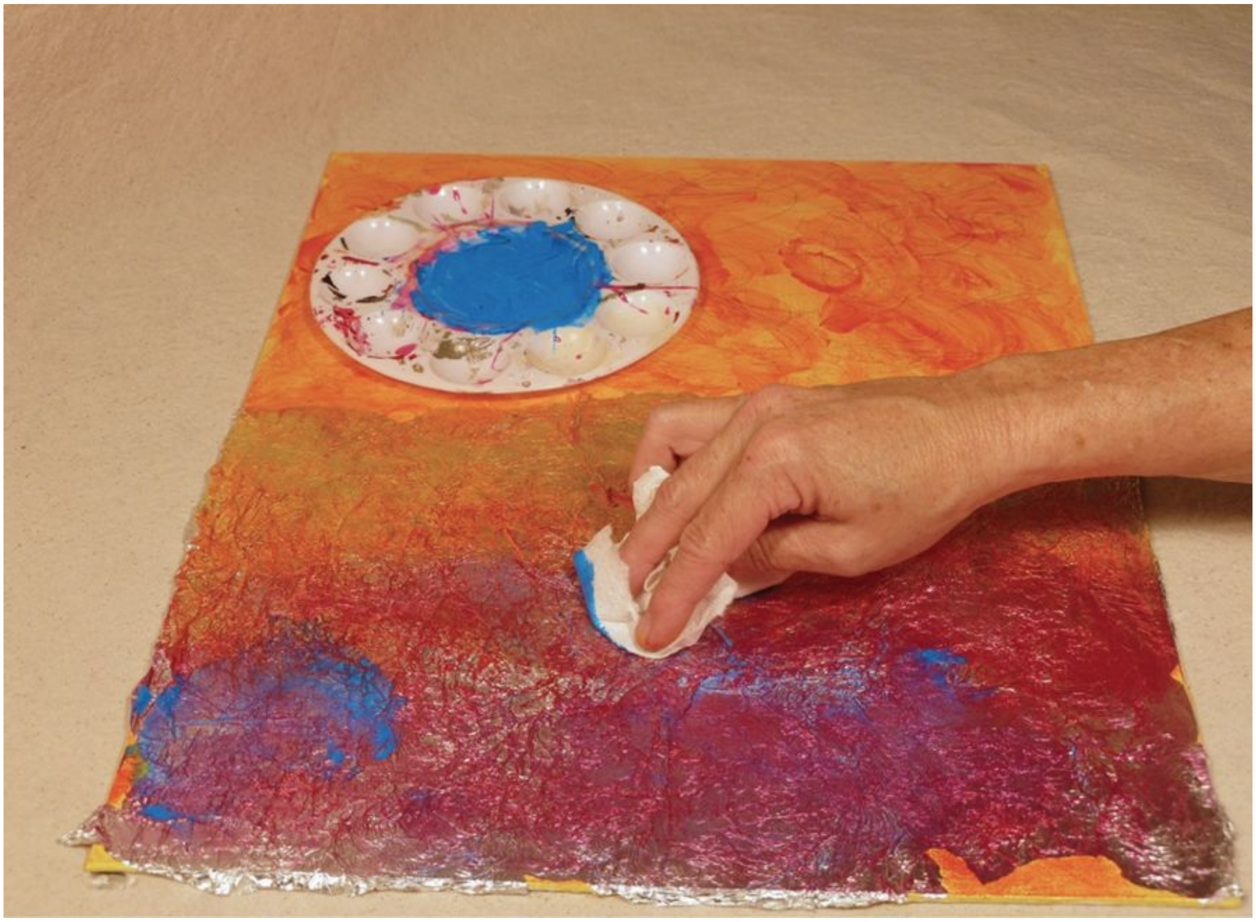
STEP 9 Place three good-sized drops (about the size of a dime) of Hansa Yellow Medium at the top of the dried aluminum section.



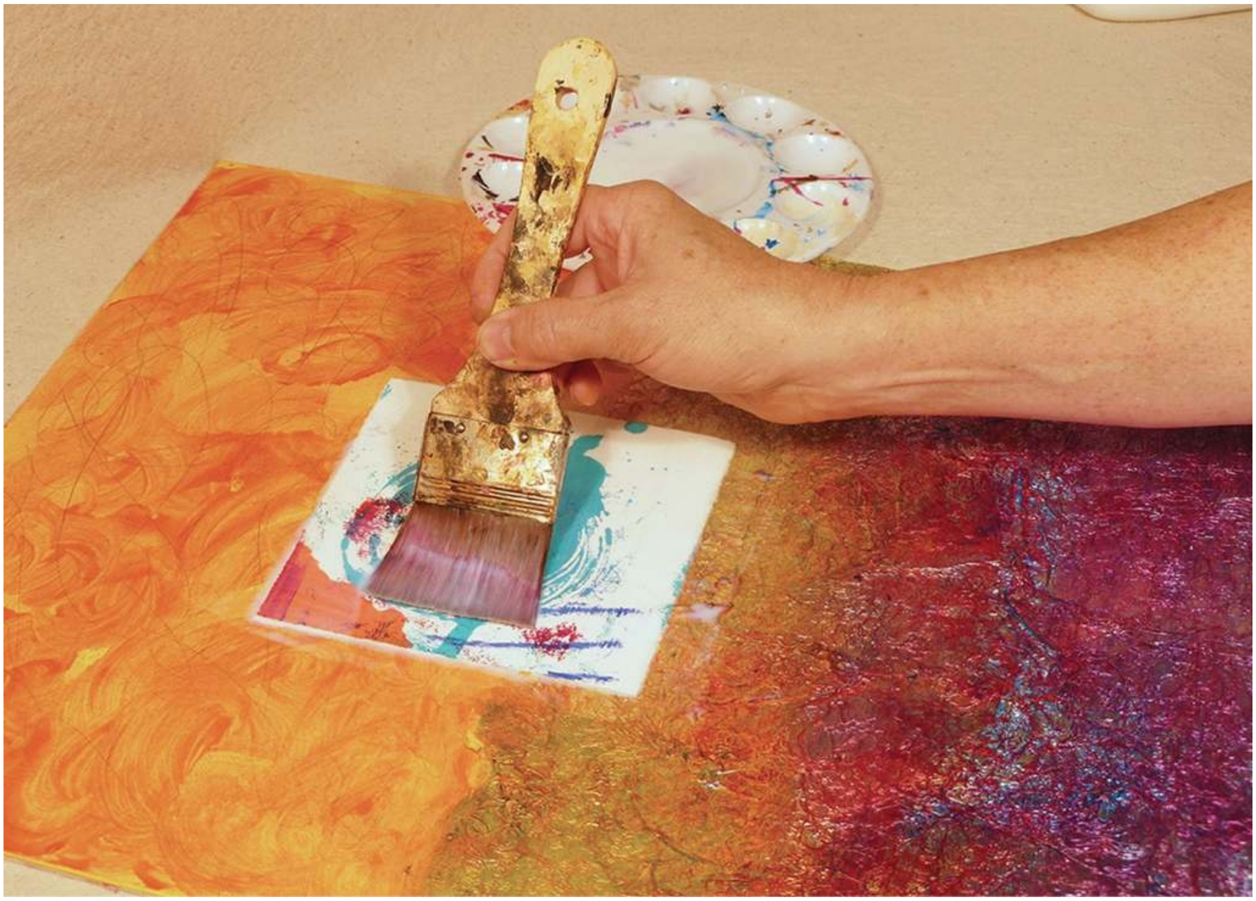
STEP 10 Quickly cover about one-third of the foil with the Hansa Yellow using a paper towel and a swirling motion. Let it dry.


GOLDEN
FLUID ACRYLICS
Quinacridone
Magenta

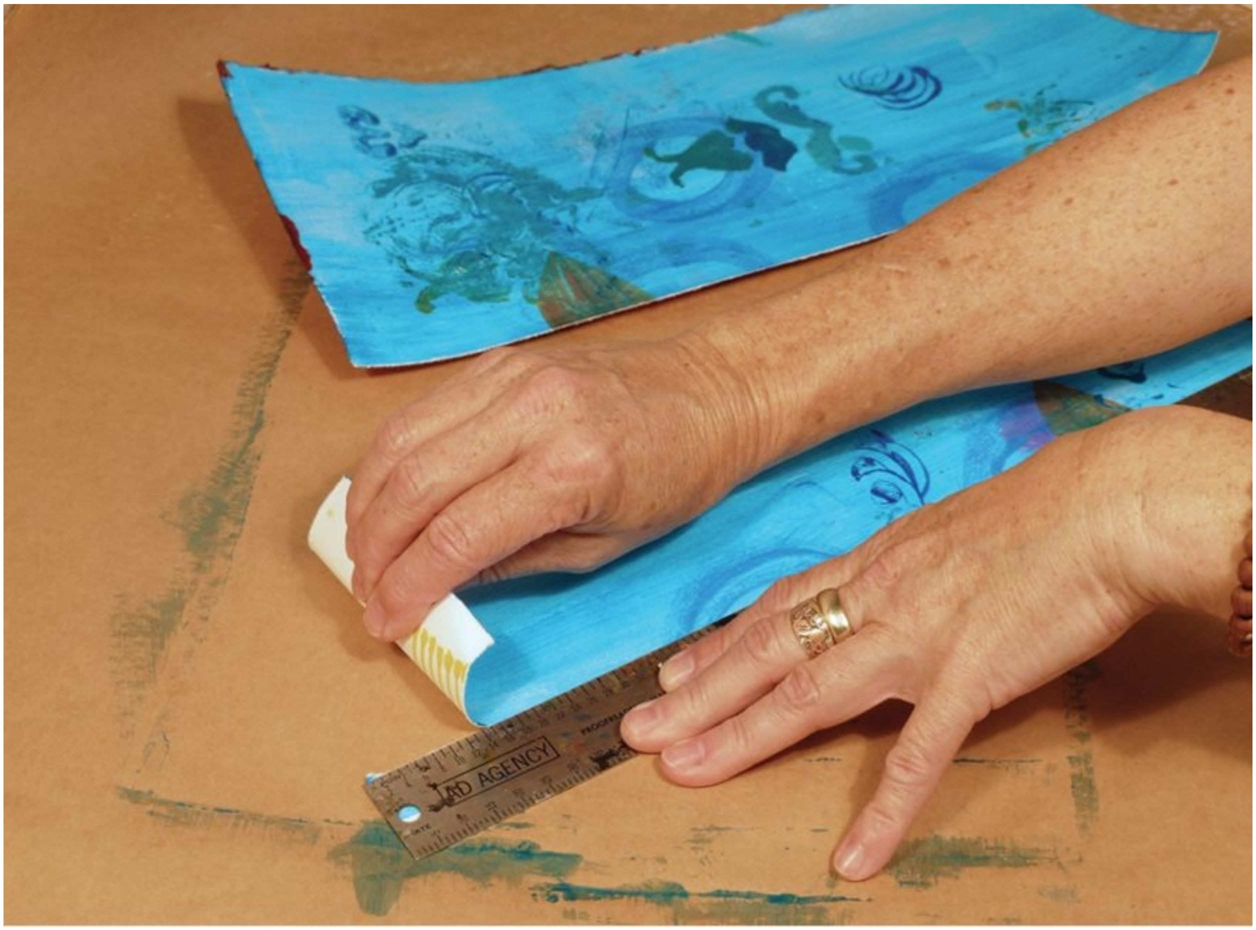
STEP 11 Repeat the above two steps with Quinacridone Magenta. Let it dry.



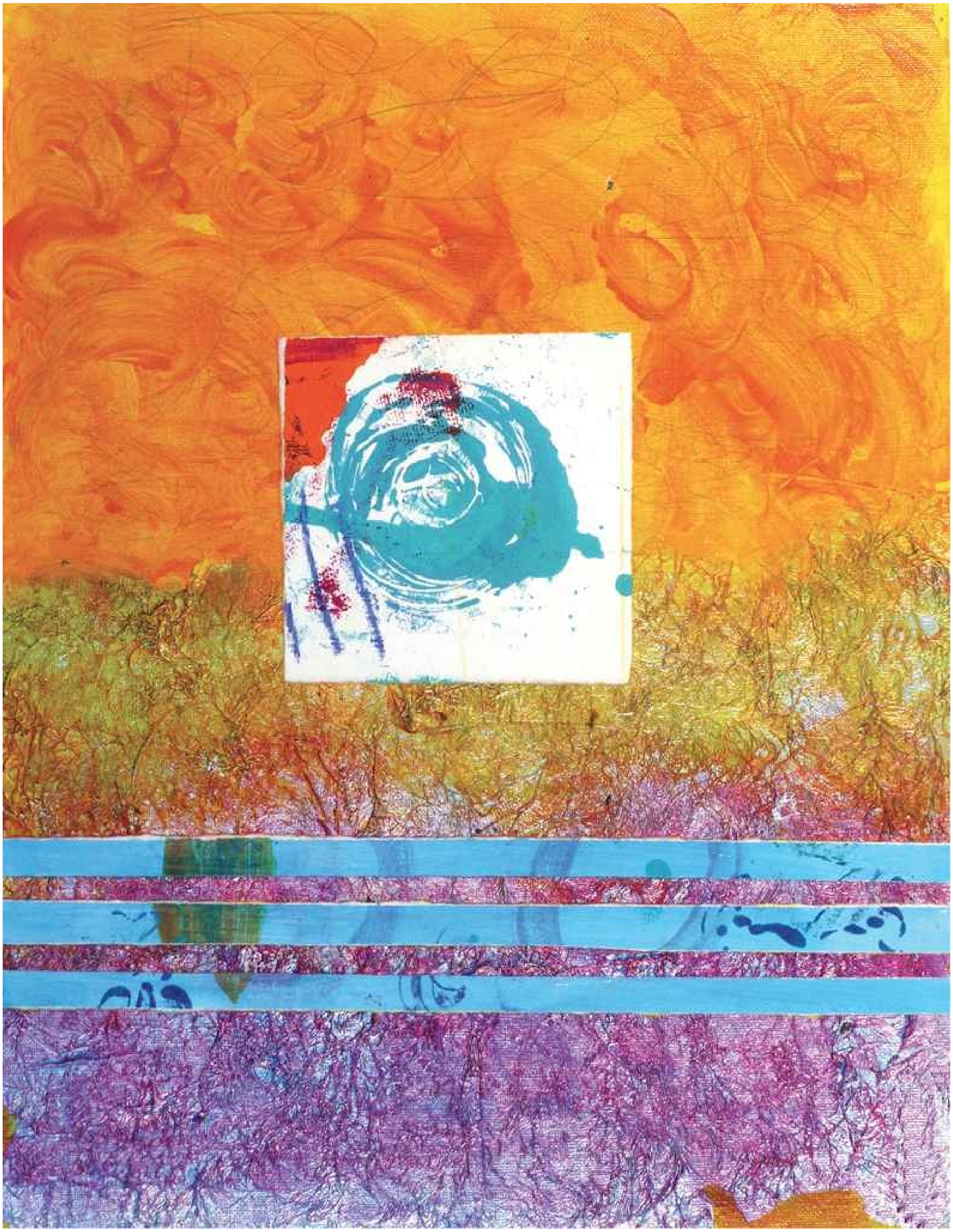
STEP 12 Make a thin transparent glaze by mixing one part Phthalo Blue (Green Shade) with ten parts gloss medium. Cover the remaining foil with this mixture using a paper towel as above. Set aside to dry. Keep the paper towels for the next exercise.



STEP 13 Using gloss medium, glue down an interesting piece of wrapping paper or a greeting card just above the middle of the canvas. Here I’m using an old monoprint. Images from magazines, newspapers and calendars work great. Be sure to put a layer of gloss medium over the image as well. If you are using a drawing or anything that is water sensitive, be sure to fix it first with spray fixative.



STEP 14 Tear paper to use as a thin band across the bottom. You could use twine, ribbons or other found objects. Glue the paper down using gloss medium.



The final piece. The aluminum foil adds a reflective quality to the paint.

Paper Towels

In my studio, I have a big drawer full of used paper towels. No, I’m not turning into one of those little old ladies who have big balls of twine in the living room! I just can’t bear to throw out paper towels that have lovely colors and textures all over them. So I use them in my paintings. Once you see this technique, you’ll never throw away a used paper towel again!

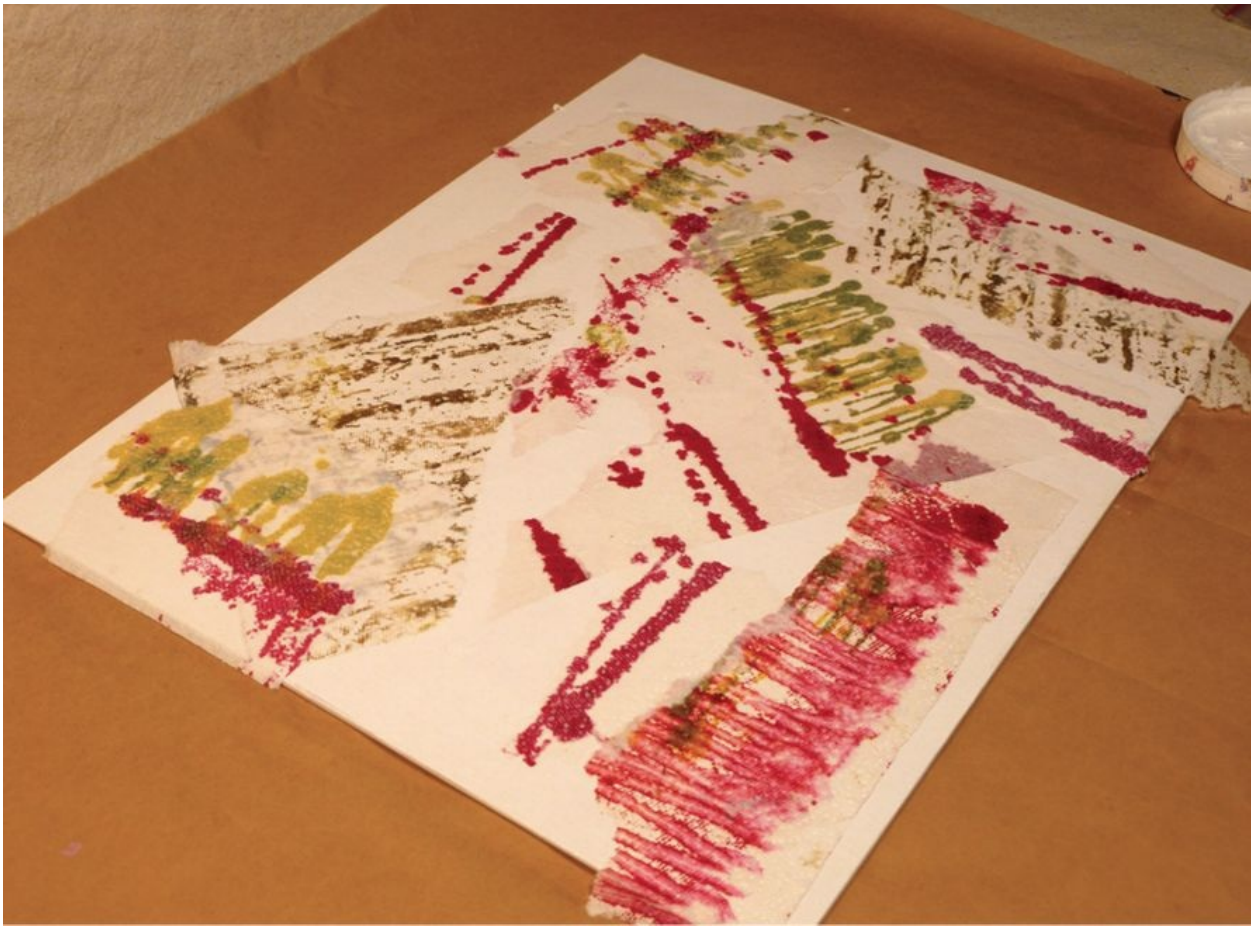
What You Need

Setup time: 10–15 minutes Painting time: 20–60 minutes 18" × 24" (46cm × 61cm) canvas or canvas board Golden Fluid Acrylics

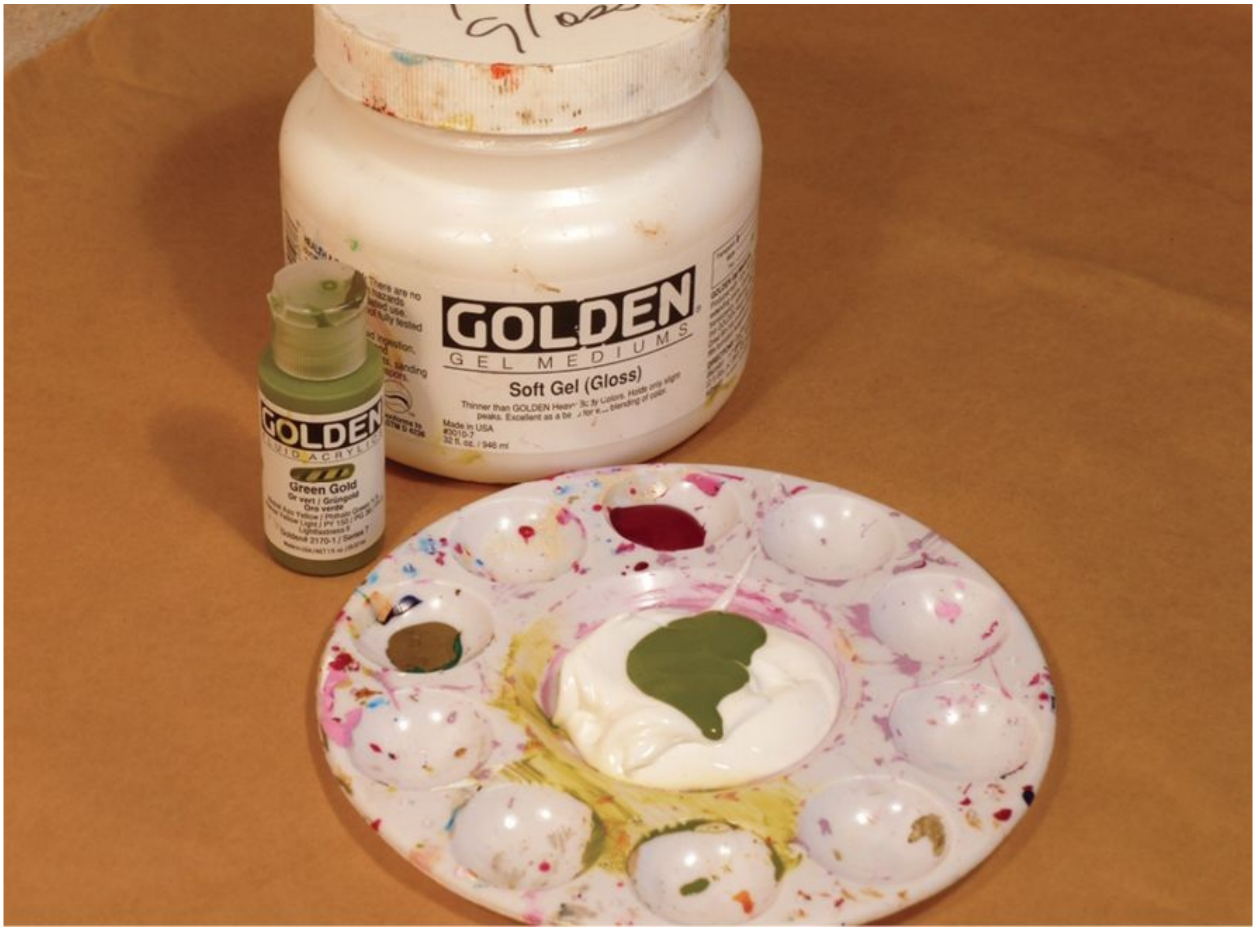
- Green Gold
- Quinacridone Magenta

modern pigments
3" (76mm) flat nylon brush palette or palette paper
gloss gel
water container
paper towels (both used and clean) spatula, Catalyst Blade or old credit card

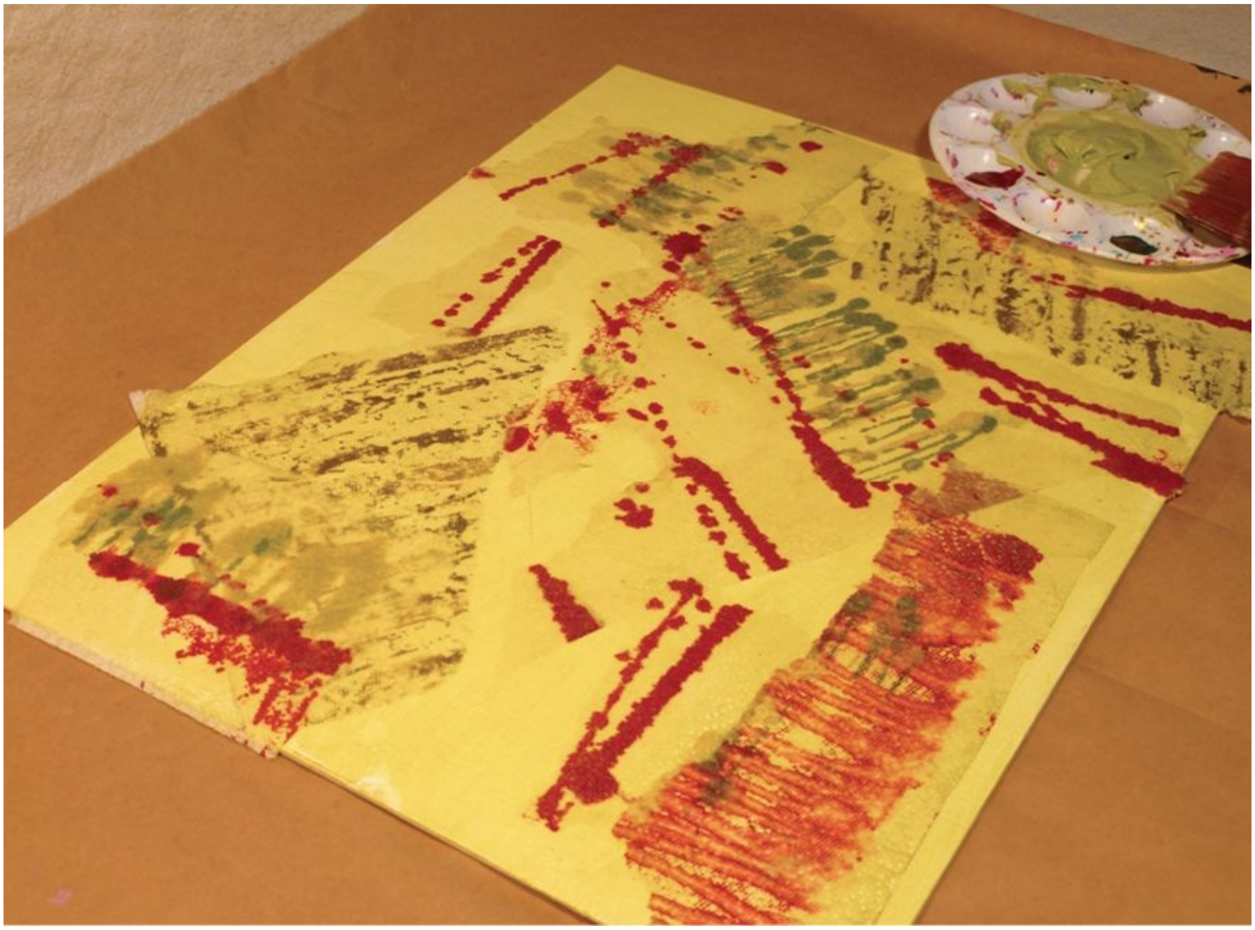
STEP 1 Grab a stack of used paper towels. If you don’t have any used, make some by painting on them or using them to mop up paint, *etc.* Tear them into different sizes and shapes.



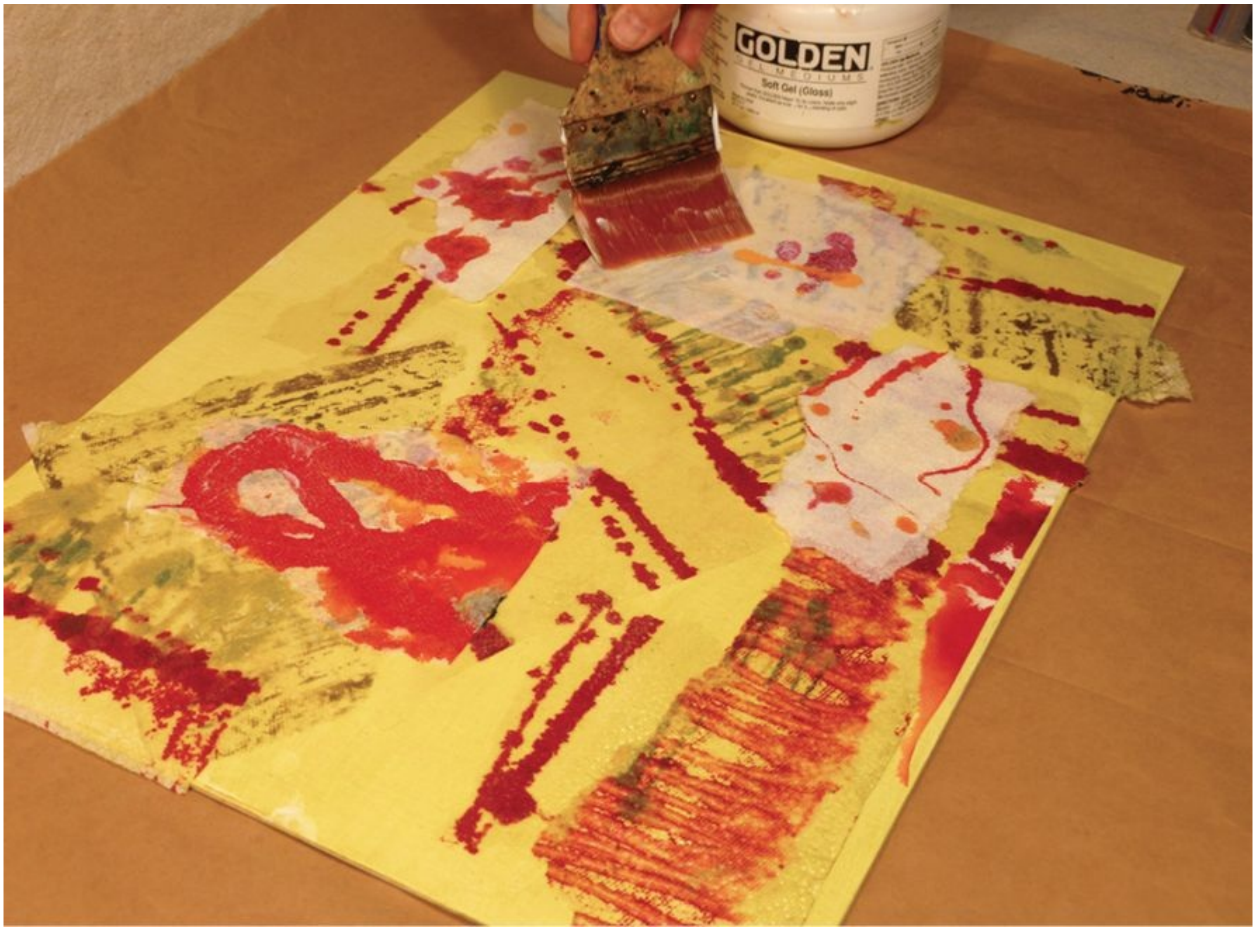
STEP 2 Arrange the paper towel shapes. Using gloss gel as your glue, collage them to the canvas and press them down for good adhesion with a credit card or spatula. Leave some of the white of the canvas showing through. Let it dry.



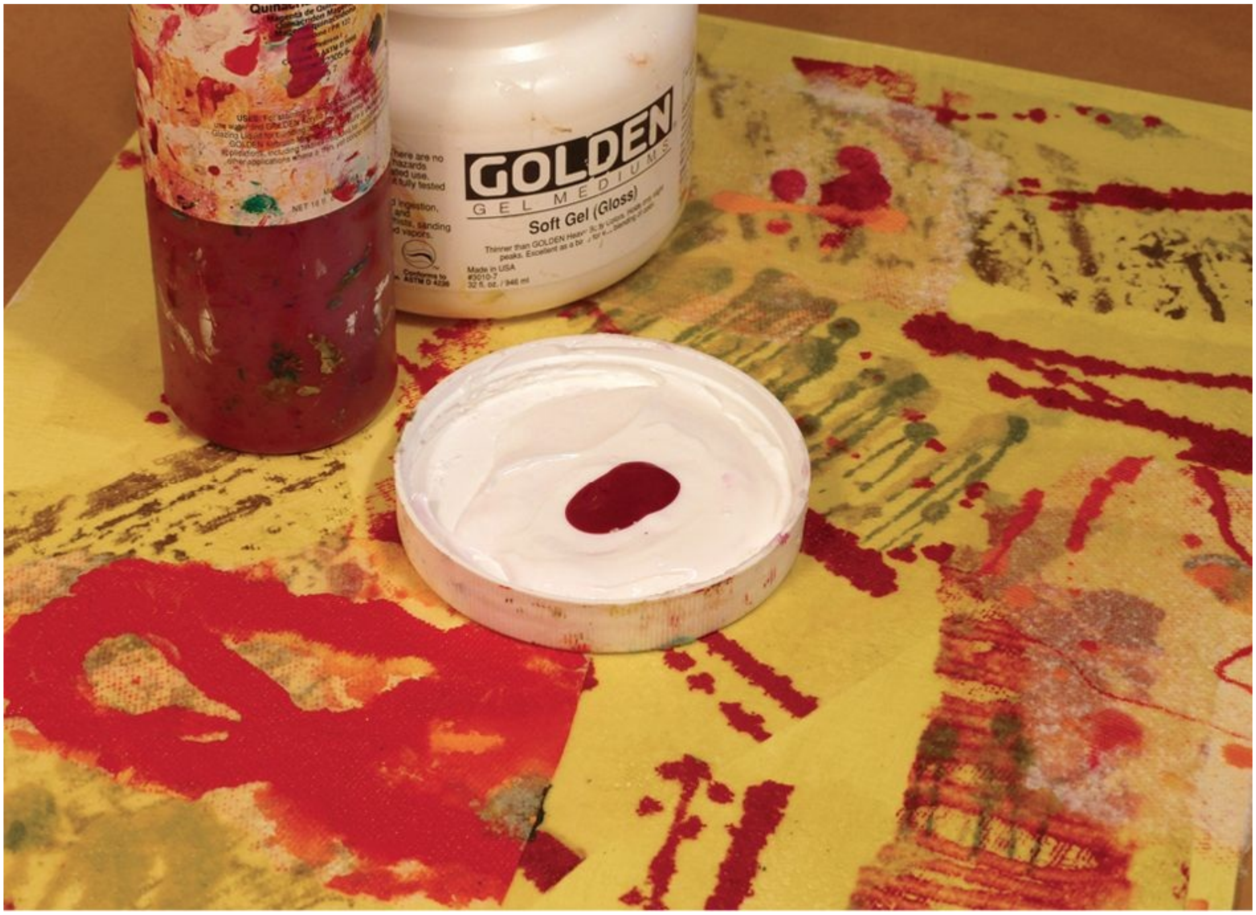
STEP 3 Make a transparent glaze with any of the modern pigments (see Color Terminology). Here I’m using Green Gold. Using a ratio of one part Green Gold to ten parts gloss gel, create a transparent glaze that has a little body to it. Remember the gloss gel looks white when it’s wet but dries clear. So err on the side of caution when adding paint. You can always add another layer later if the color is not saturated enough.



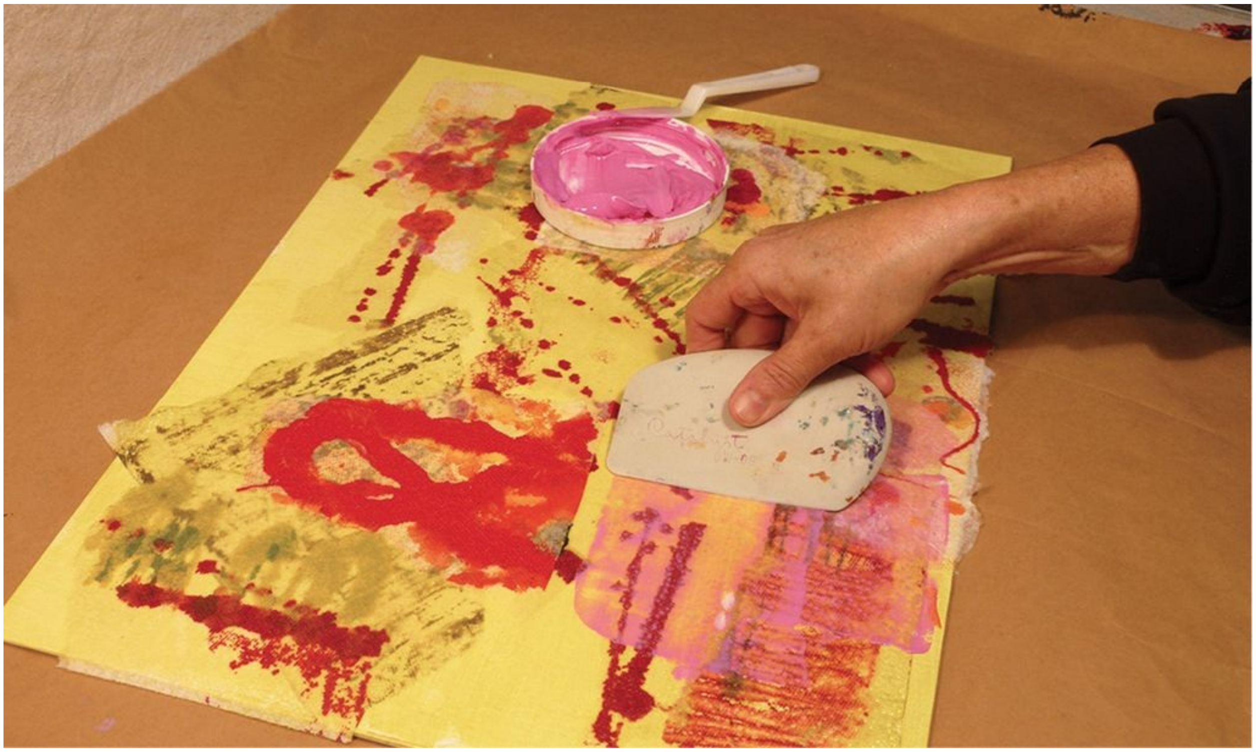
STEP 4 Cover the entire canvas board with a thin layer of the glaze mixture and let it dry thoroughly.


GOLDEN
GEL MEDIUMS
Soft Gel (Gloss)

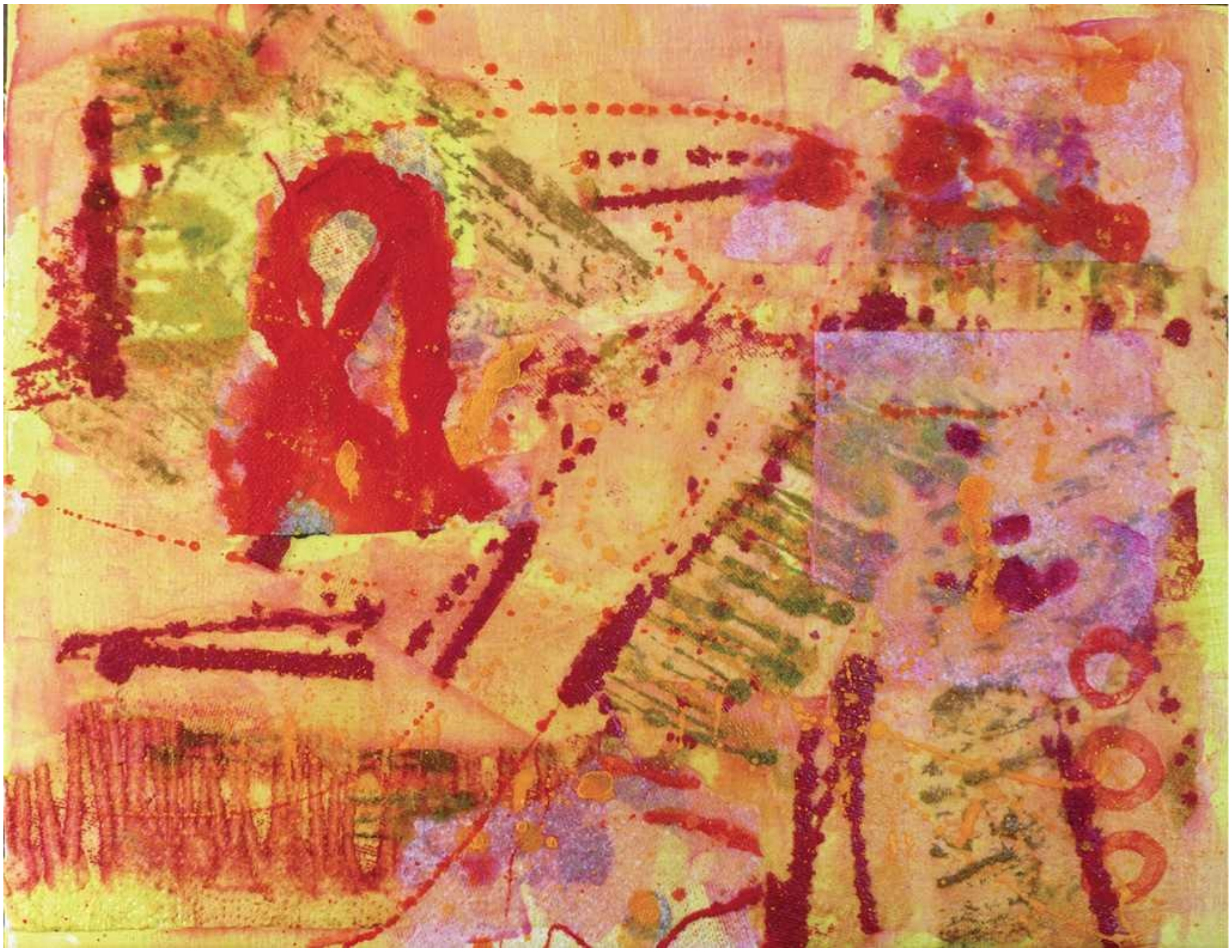
STEP 5 Glue down another layer of paper towels and let it dry again.



STEP 6 Make another transparent glaze and cover the surface, leaving some of the first layer showing through. Here I’m using Quinacridone Magenta. Magenta is a complement to green and will mute the bright green slightly and warm it up.



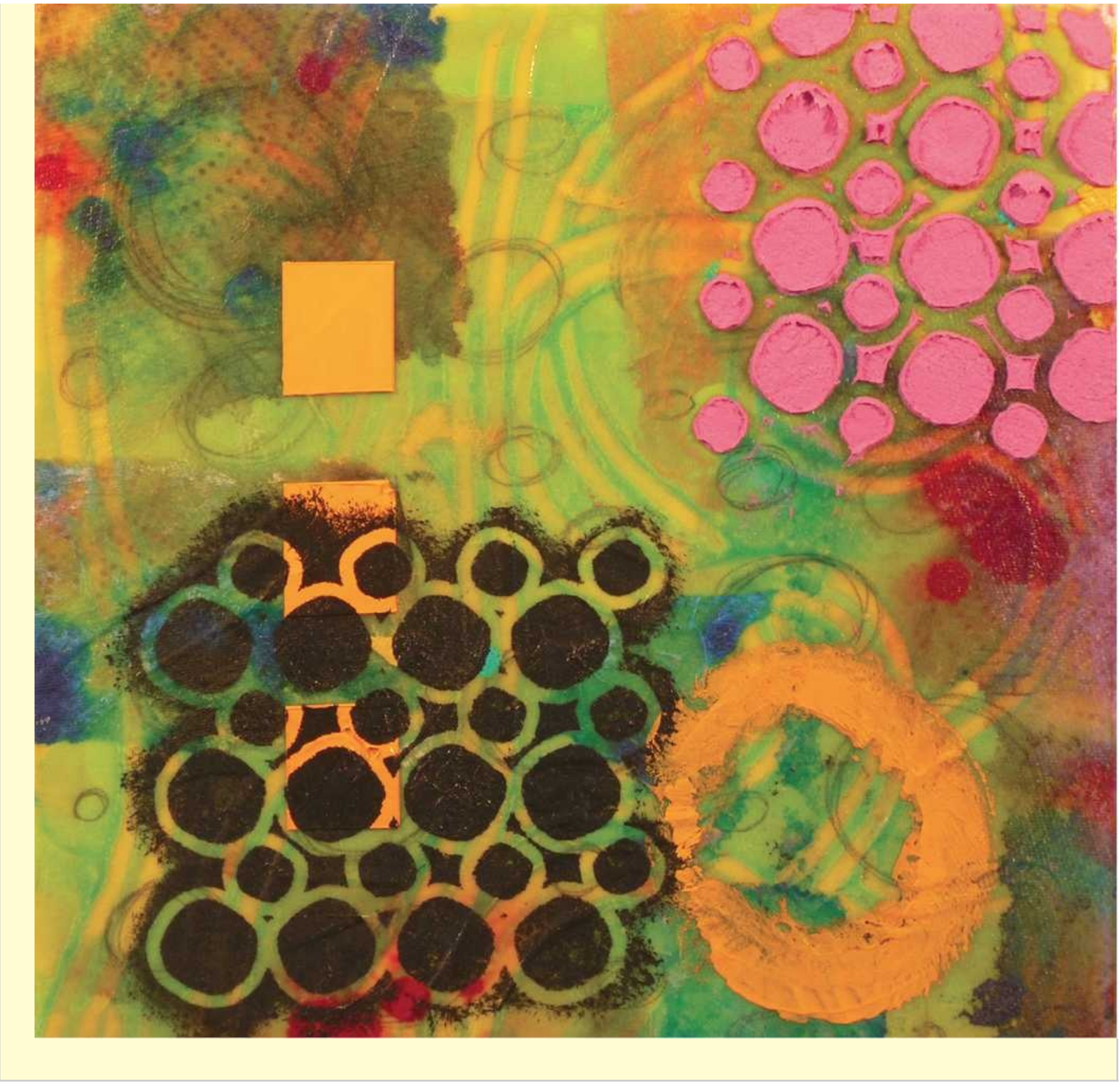
STEP 7 Using a credit card, spatula or a Catalyst tool, scrape the Quinacridone Magenta glaze mixture over the entire canvas, keeping it thin and letting some of the Green Gold layer show through.



The finished product. You can continue with layer upon layer, covering them with gels and other items. The idea is to explore what's just lying around. Who knew plain old paper towels could be so much fun? And it's recycling as well! Good for the planet, good for the artist!

Acrylic as an Adhesive

One of the great things about acrylic is its excellence as a glue. It stays flexible and won't crack. If you need to adhere a heavier item, like a rock for instance, use a heavier gel. For thin or delicate papers, use a minimal amount of polymer medium to avoid wrinkling the paper. You can also tint the gel or medium with paint to match the background. This makes the acrylic less noticeable as an adhesive. Remember too that all gels or mediums that have gloss in the title will dry absolutely clear. Matte gels and mediums are less clear and can create waxy surfaces if you build them up in layers.

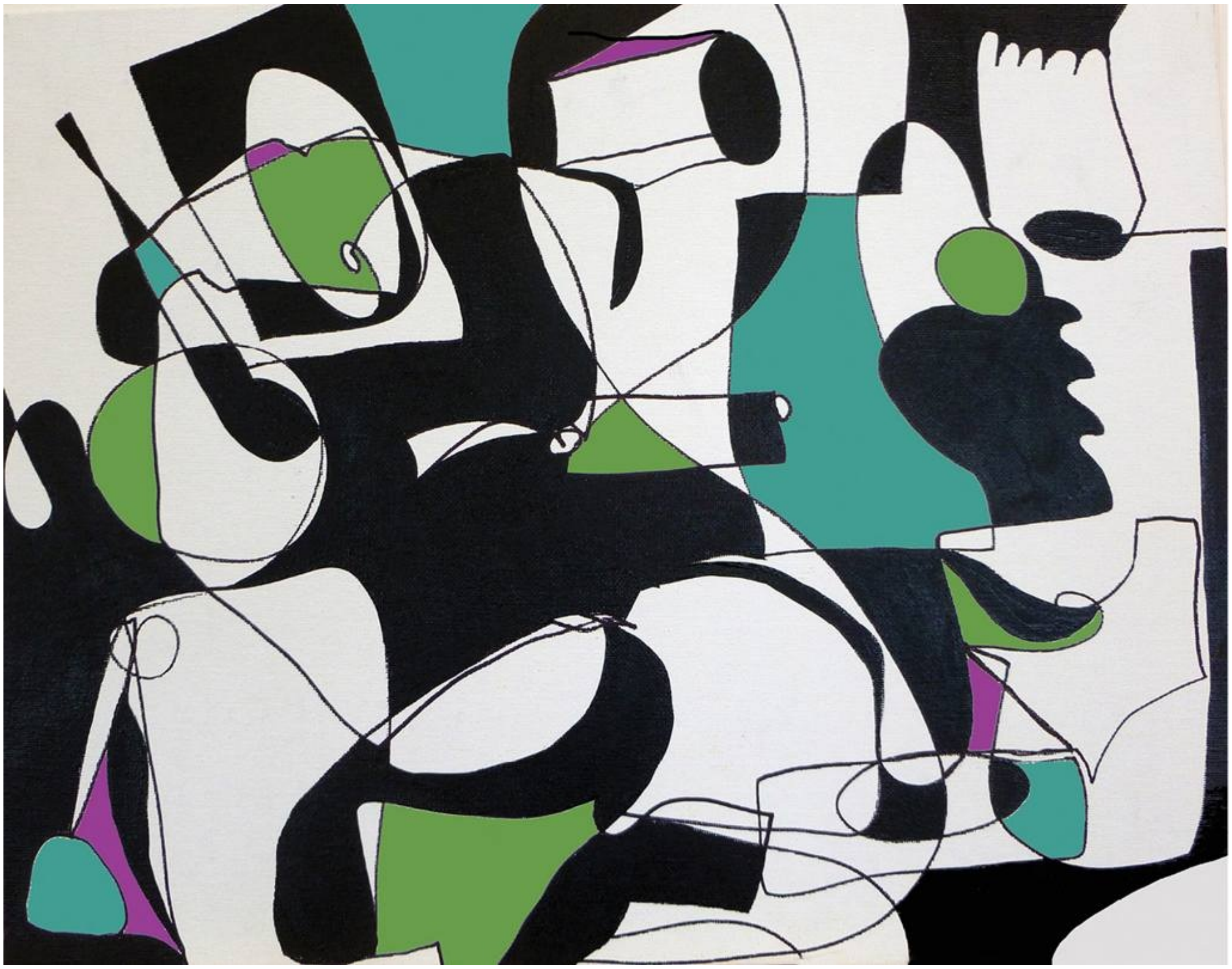


EXPLORATION TEN

Letting the Brain Play

One of the questions I get asked most by students is “What should I paint?” Sometimes it’s hard to see the world from an abstracted perspective. As human beings we spend a great deal of our time naming the objects we see. This is important for our day-to-day survival. You really need to be able to recognize a stop sign when you see it! What I call our “executive brain” is in charge of keeping us aware of our surroundings, driving on the right side of the road and recognizing a stop sign when we see it. Our ancient, daydreaming, creative brain, the one often referred to as the “lizard brain,” gets shunted to the side quite often. This is the part of our brain we need to engage to make good, strong abstract paintings.

“Art arises when the secret vision of the artist and the manifestation of nature agree to find new shapes.” —Kahlil Gibran



LAUGH OUT LOUD

Tesia Blackburn Mixed media

10" × 13" (25cm × 33cm)

Blind Contour Painting

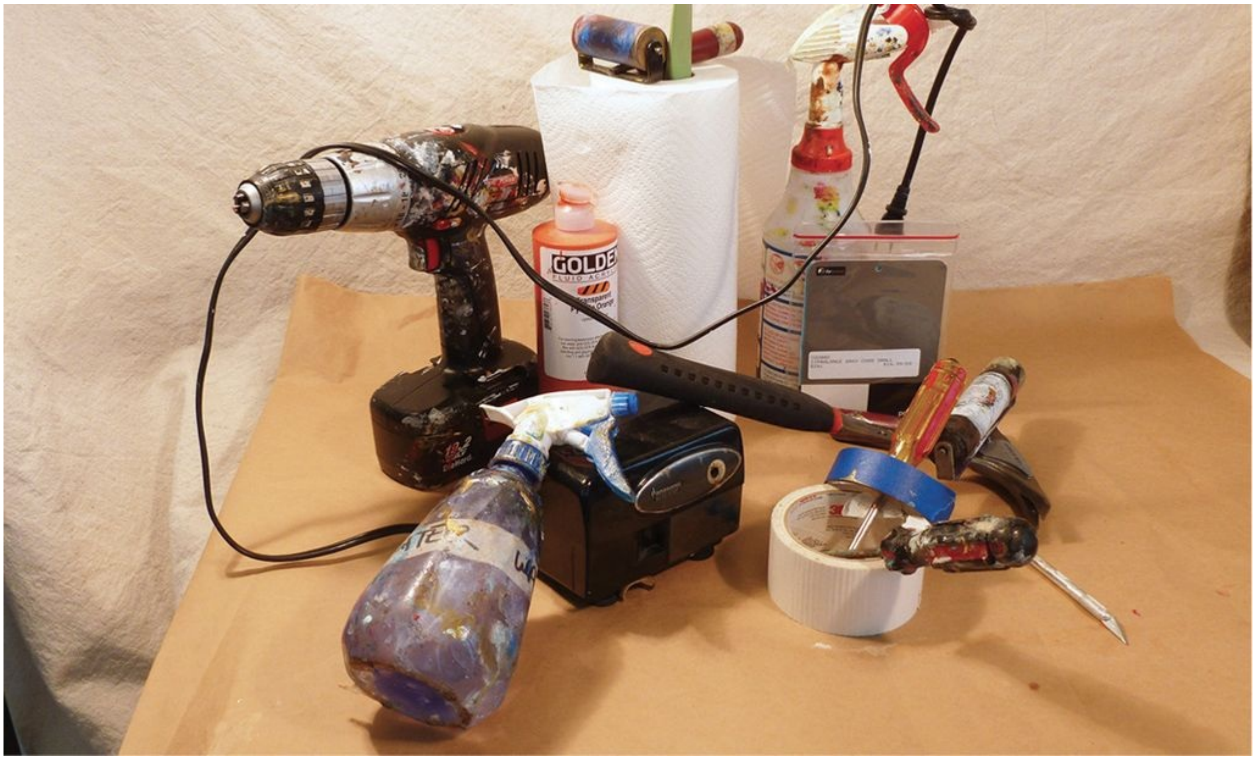
Here’s a nifty way to keep your executive brain busy so your lizard brain can come out to play. If you can make shapes that your executive brain can’t name, it will get bored and go to sleep. Then you can play in Lizardland!

What You Need

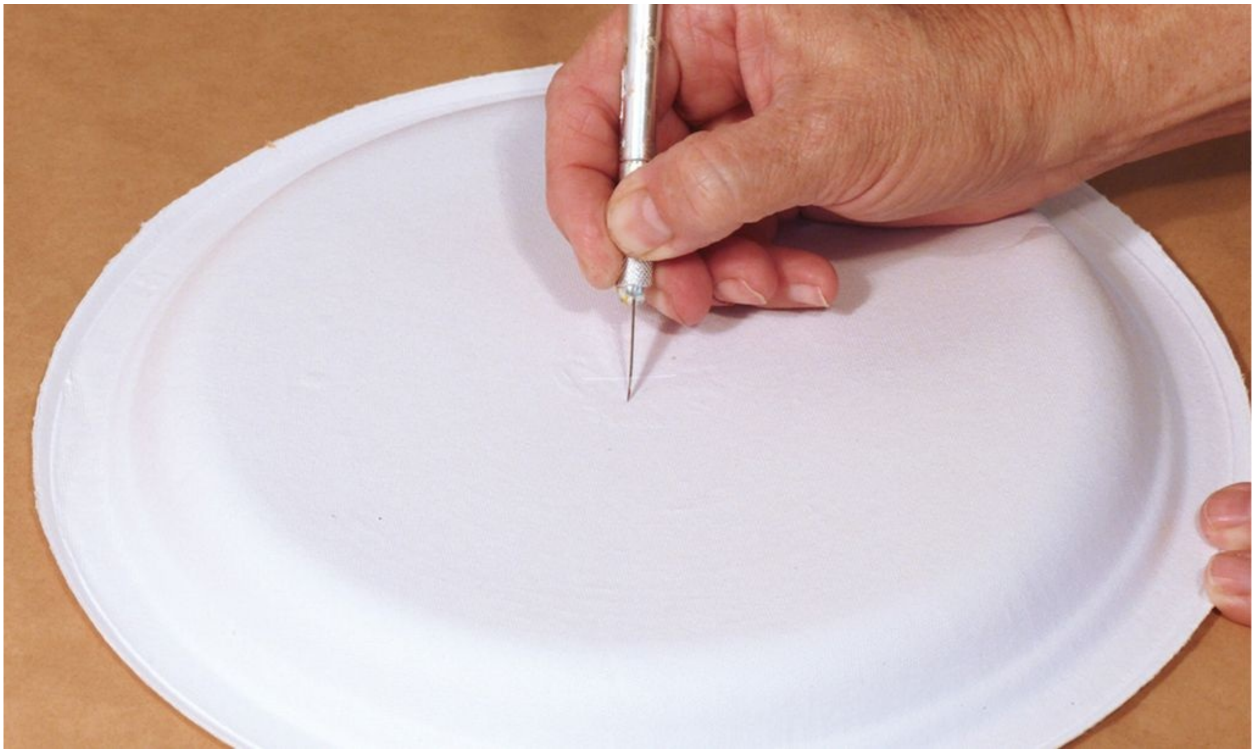
Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes assorted brushes
canvas, watercolor paper or canvas board Golden Fluid Acrylic, Carbon Black permanent marker, black medium tip water container
paper towels
palette
large paper plate
craft knife or box cutter

VERSION ONE: PERMANENT MARKER ON CANVAS

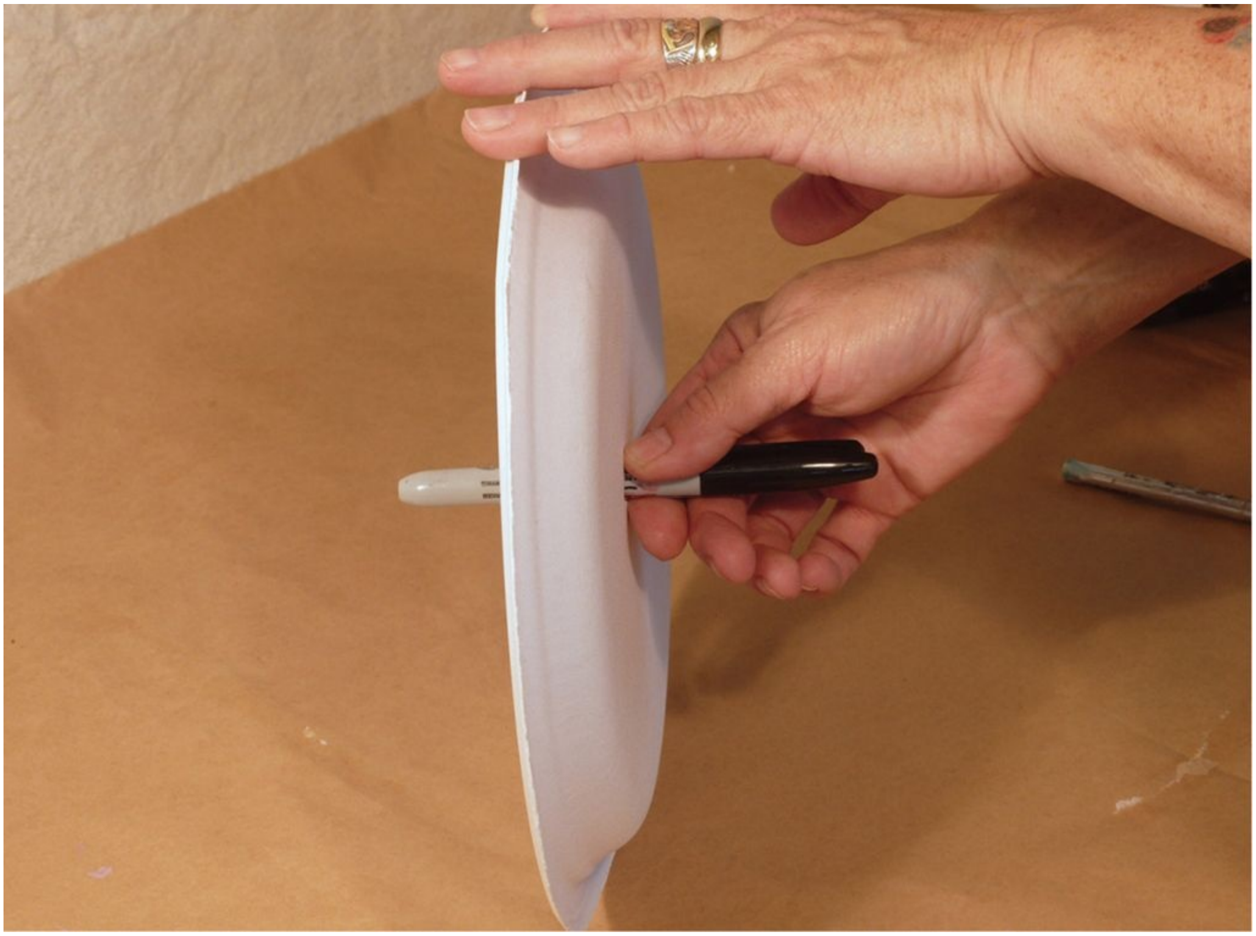
Who says you need lots of color to make interesting art? Use a plain old black permanent marker and get lots of mileage out of this technique.



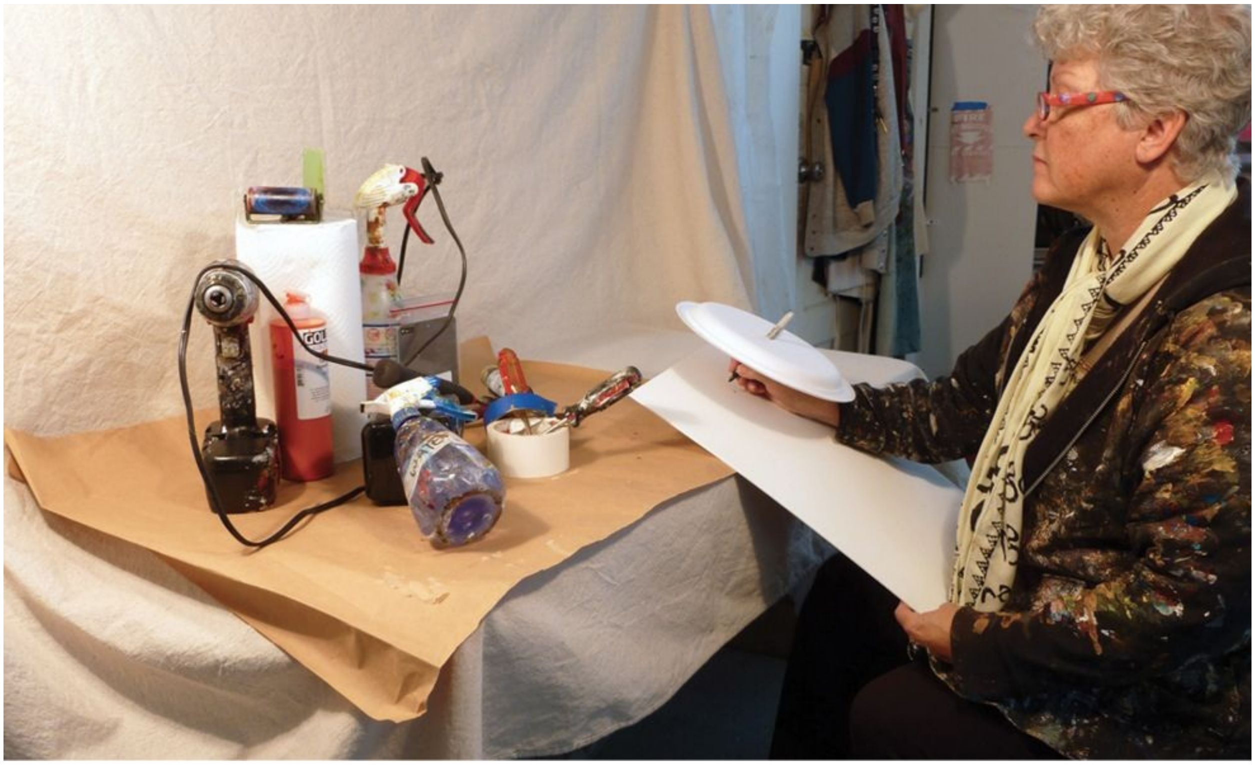
STEP 1 Set up a complex still life. Use unusual items and make sure to use varied sizes and shapes of items. Put some things on their side or upside down to make the shapes even more unusual.



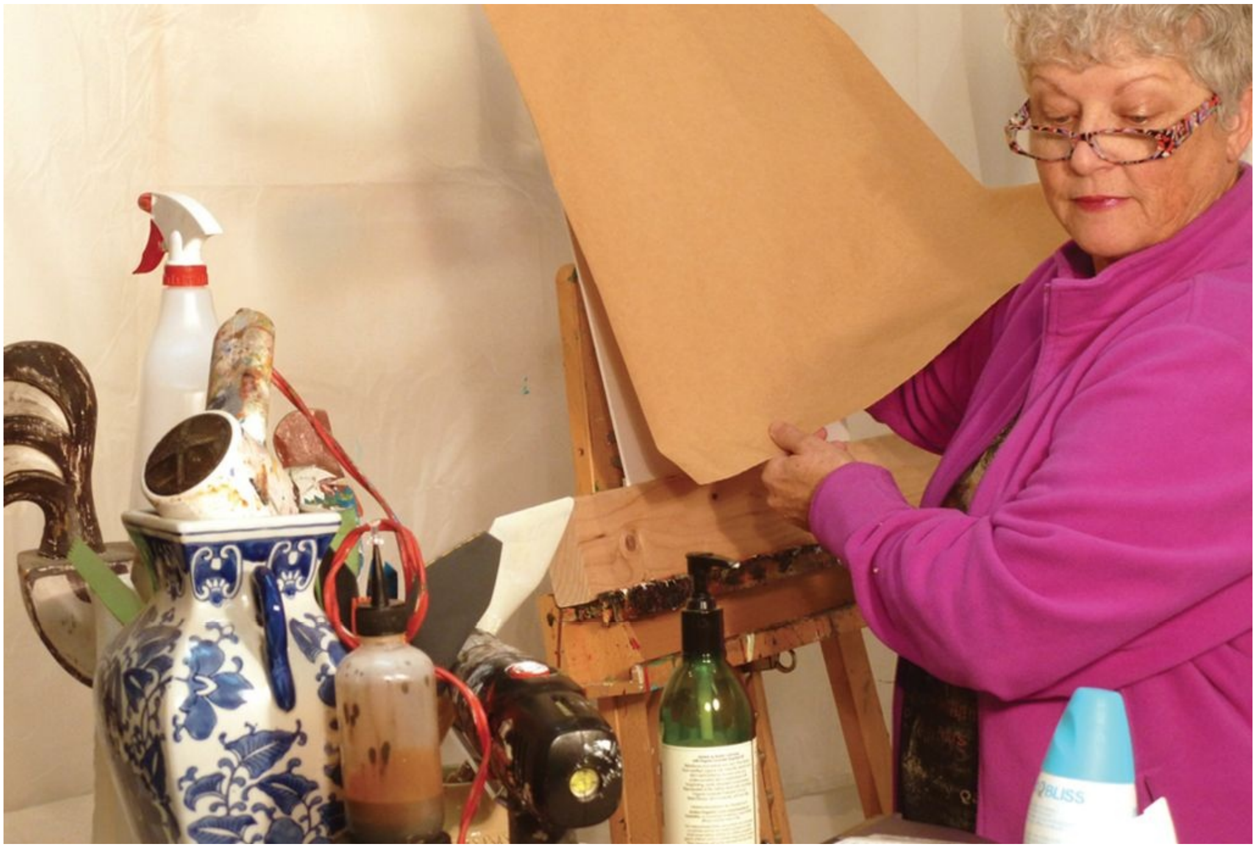
STEP 2 Cut an *X* in the middle of the paper plate with the craft knife or box cutter.



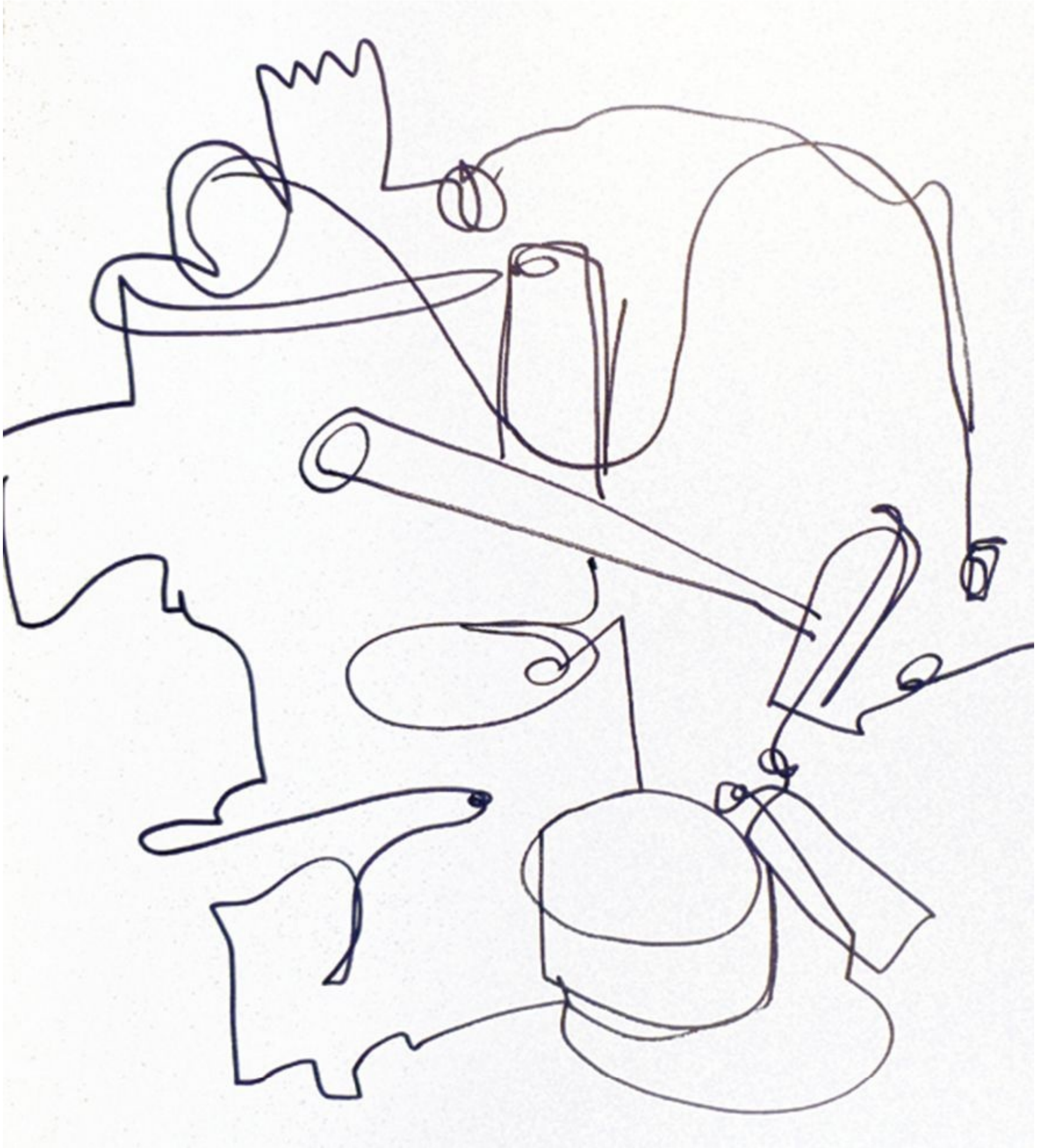
STEP 3 Push the marker through the *X* in the paper plate.



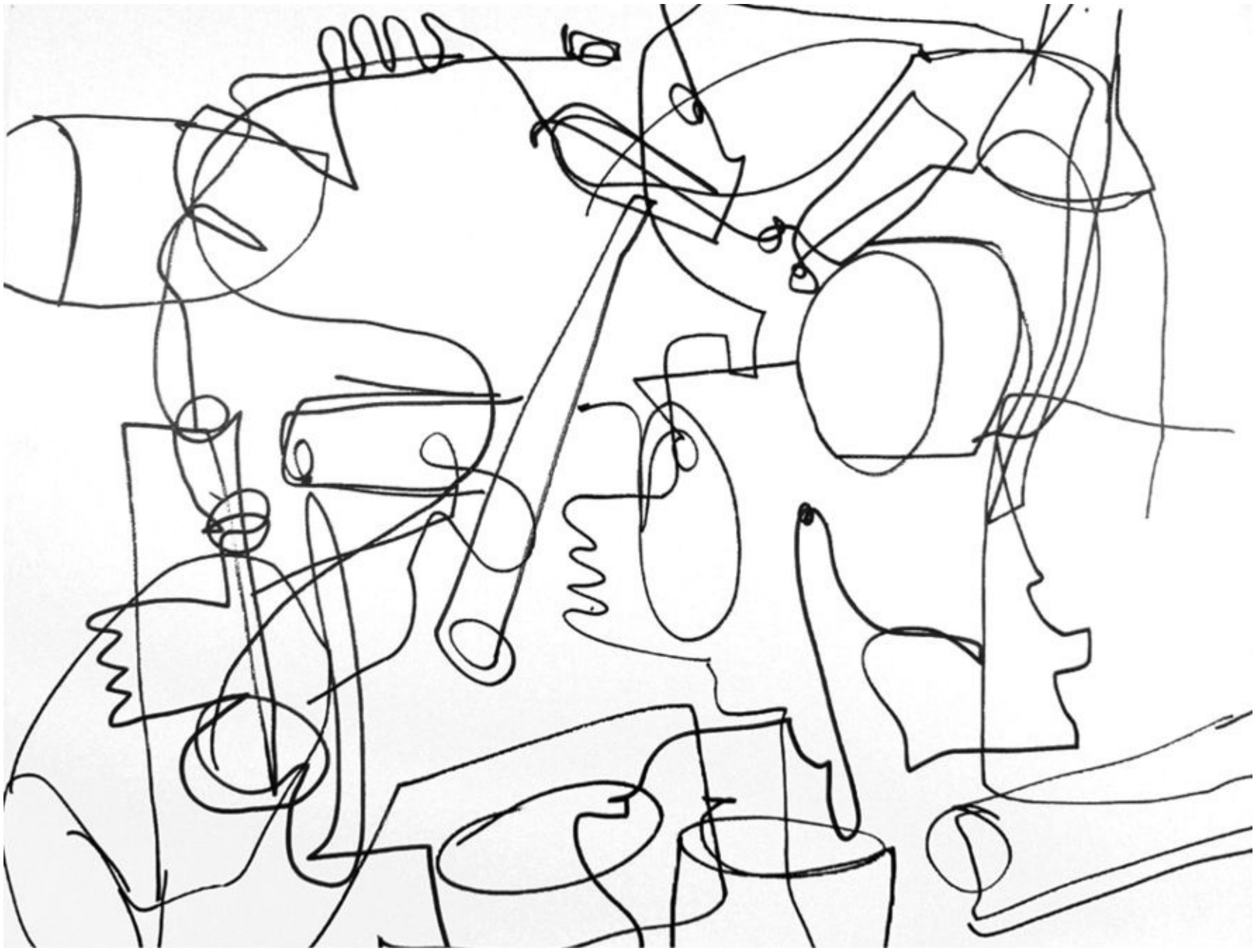
STEP 4 Position yourself in front of the still life with your marker/paper plate combo and begin drawing on the canvas, making sure you can’t see what you are drawing. Imagine that you are tracing the edges of the objects with your marker. Don’t peek! It doesn’t matter if you go off the canvas or cross over your own lines. And it really doesn’t matter if your drawing doesn’t look like the still life. In fact, it’s a requirement that it doesn’t.



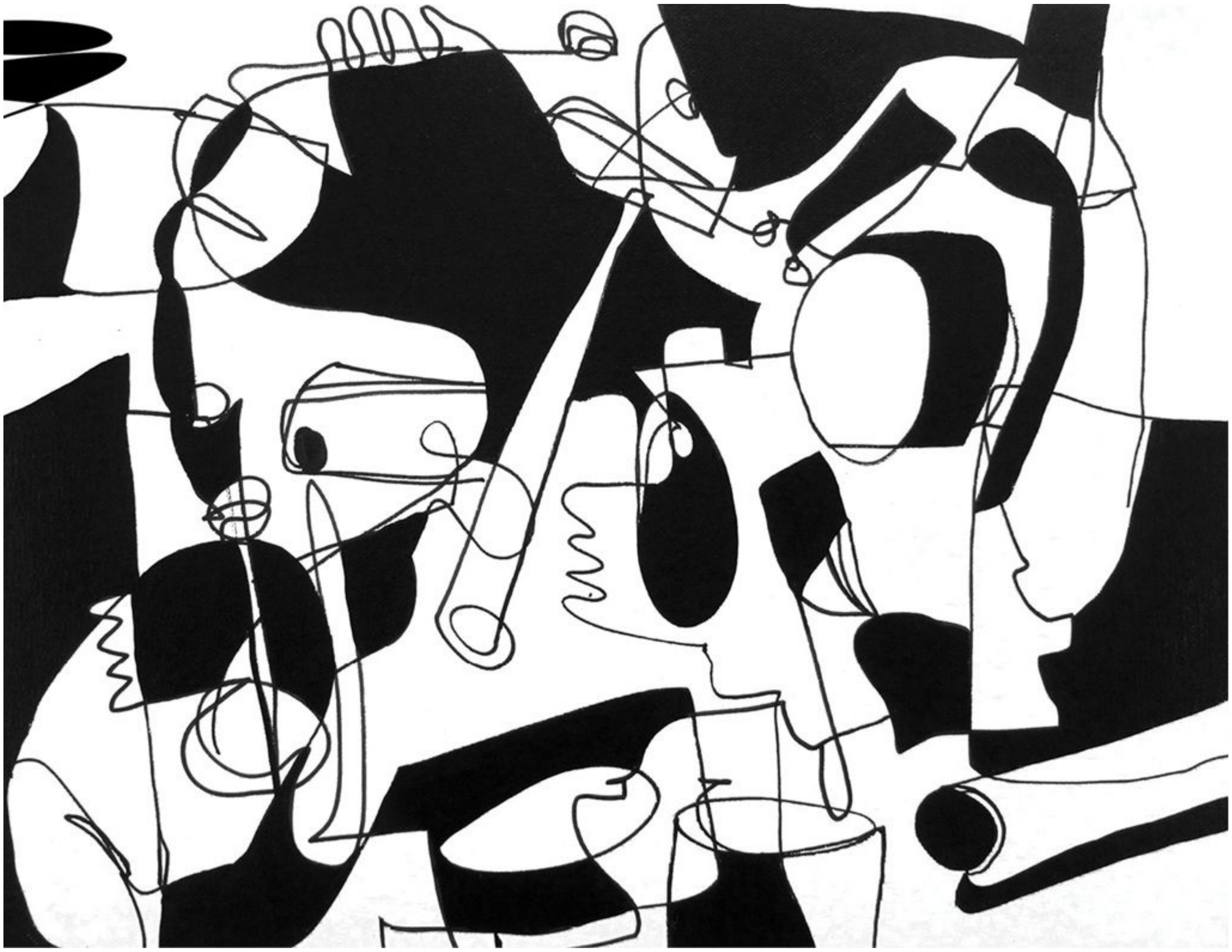
STEP 5 Alternatively, you can also tape a piece of kraft paper to the top of your canvas and slip your hand under it to draw. This works well if you’re using an easel or a larger canvas.



STEP 6 Here’s my first drawing. You can see that it doesn’t resemble any of the objects. Remember, we’re not trying to make a good drawing, we’re trying to create an abstract composition.



STEP 7 Rotate the canvas 90 degrees to the left and draw right on top of the first drawing. Use the paper plate again to prevent seeing what you are drawing.



STEP 8 Using Carbon Black fluid, fill in several shapes, create new shapes, leave a great deal of white, too. Here’s the result. Is this fun or what? When we do this in class, my students always comment on how soothing this exercise is. Personally I could do these all day, every day!

VERSION TWO: PERMANENT MARKER ON CARDBOARD

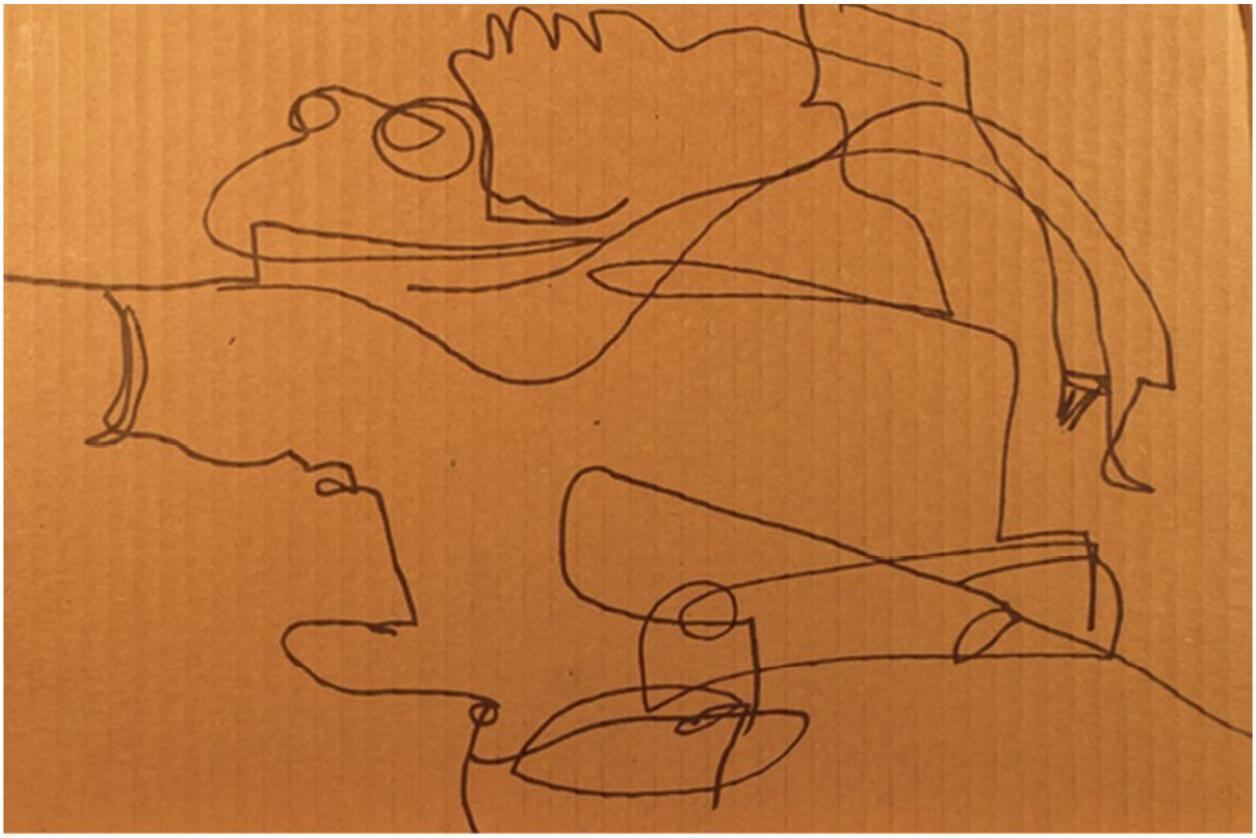
Never throw away another brown box. Cut them up and make fabulous artwork with them!

What You Need

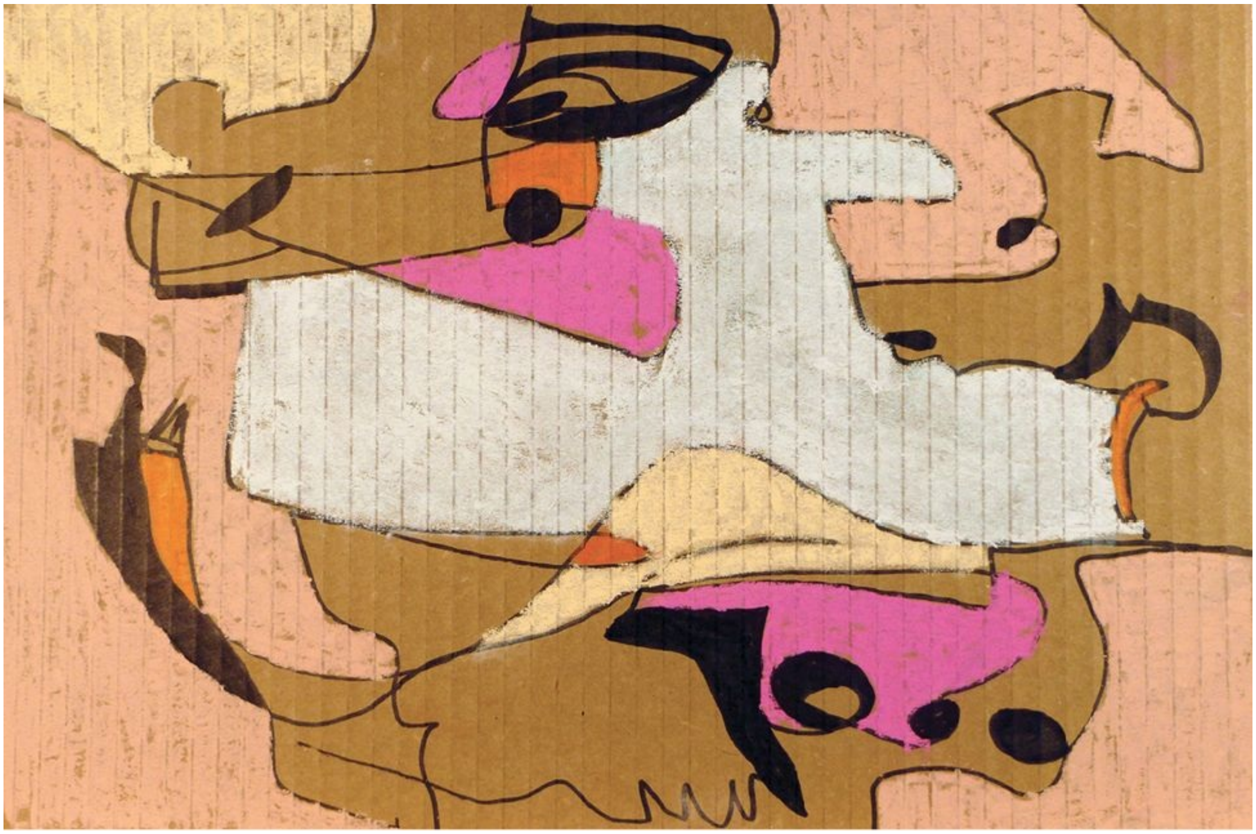
Setup time: 10 minutes

Painting time: 20–60 minutes corrugated cardboard

chalk pastels
permanent marker, black medium tip spray fixative (optional) large paper plate
craft knife or box cutter



STEP 1 Follow the steps in Version One to create your blind contour drawing, only this time draw on brown corrugated cardboard instead of canvas.



STEP 2 Using chalk pastels, create your composition, leaving some of the brown cardboard showing. You can also fill in shapes with the black marker. When you’re finished you can use spray fixative to fix the pastel.

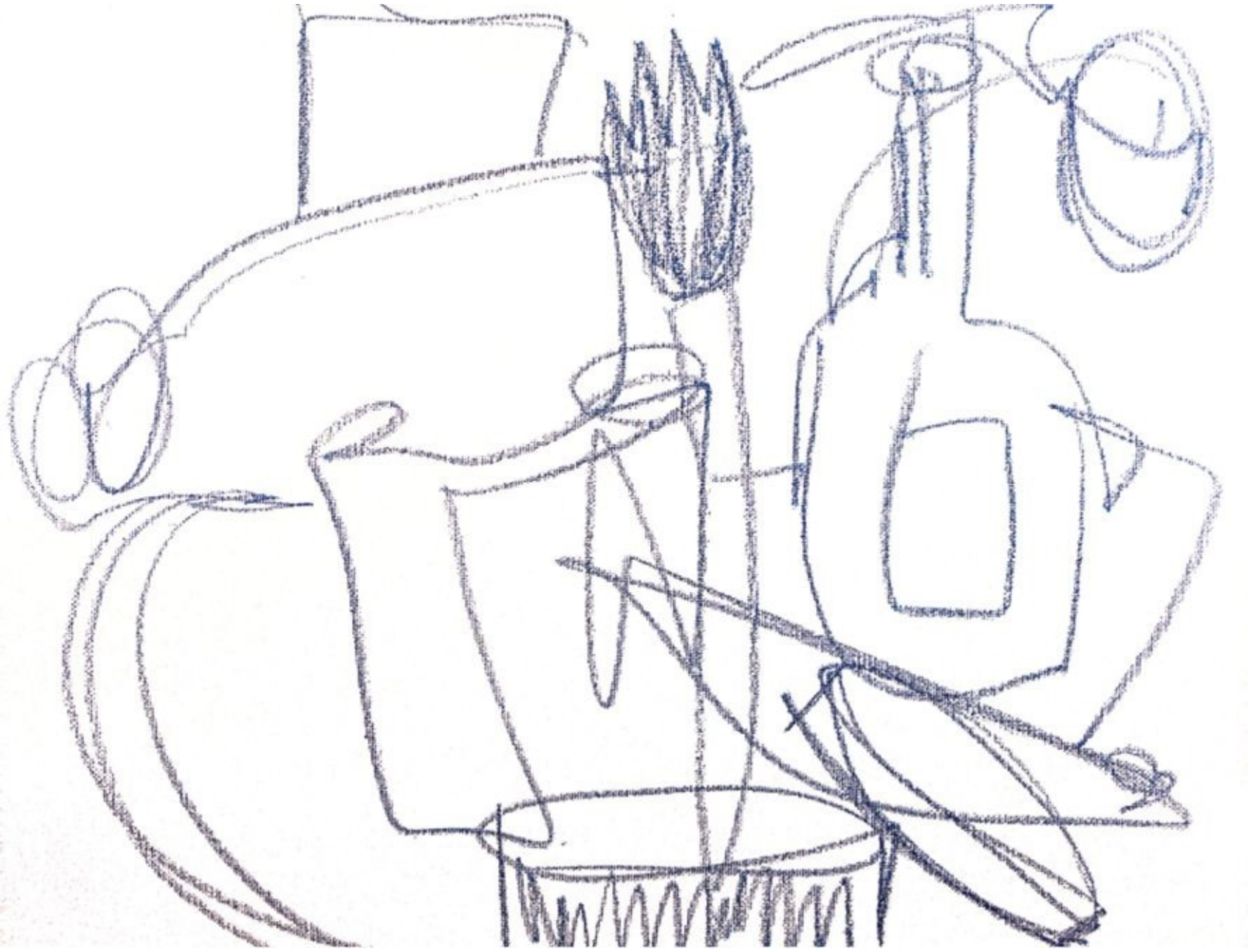
VERSION THREE: OIL PASTEL ON CANVAS

Oil pastels are easy to use and offer a wide array of colors. You could also do this version with children’s wax crayons.

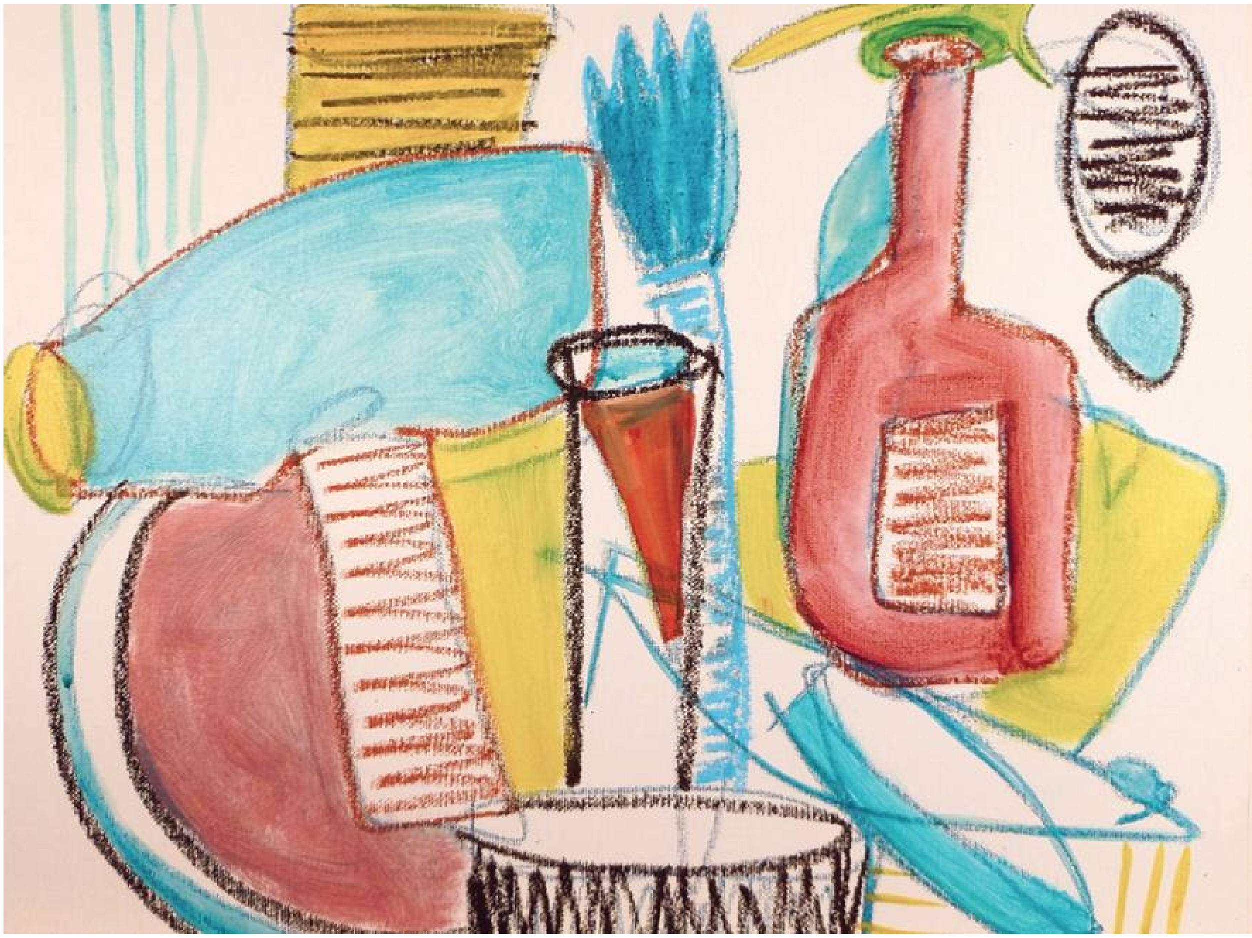
What You Need

Setup time: 10 minutes
Painting time: 20–60 minutes canvas board, watercolor paper or canvas oil pastels
acrylic paints
assorted brushes
water container
paper towels
palette

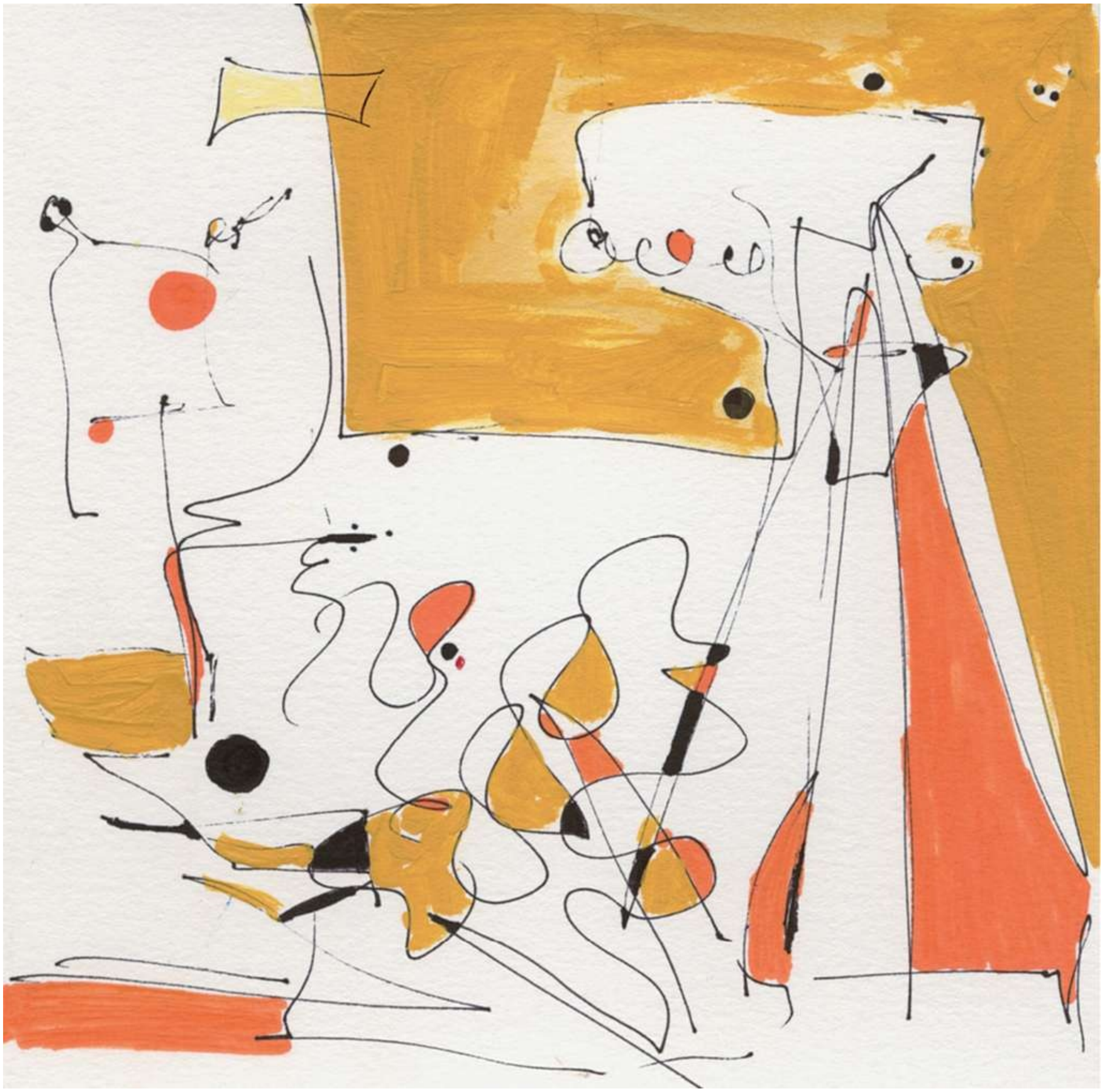
large paper plate
craft knife or box cutter



STEP 1 In this version we will branch out with a little bit more color. Repeating the steps from Versions One and Two, draw on the surface with an oil pastel. In this case I used a dark blue oil pastel.



STEP 2 Fill in some of the shapes with acrylic paint, and go back into the drawing with more oil pastel. Leave a great deal of white, too.



Play by Patrice Drago

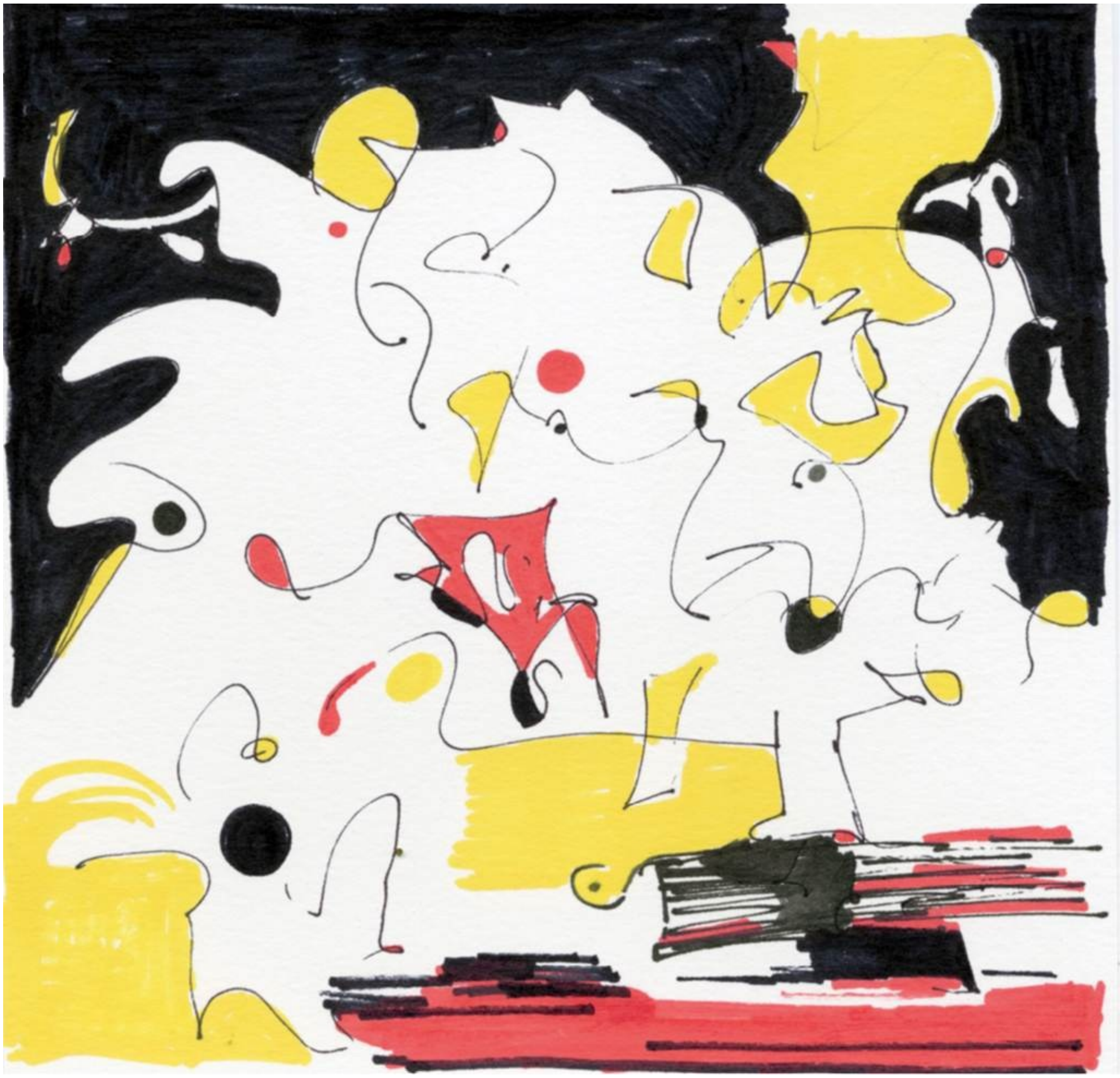
Here’s a terrific piece done using this technique by my pal, Patrice Drago. She makes good use of the white space. You can see she really let her mind wander, didn’t worry about the outcome and came up with a gem of a painting.

THREE ARTIST INTERVIEWS

Inspiring Perspectives

Before I became a fulltime working artist—when I had to work at part-time jobs—I used to keep a record of all my studio time because I felt like I never had enough. Over the years it has become clear to me that there will never be enough time to just make art. Now instead of working at part-time jobs, I am busy teaching or doing paperwork or framing or a million other things that come with the territory. So I wanted to let you hear, in their own words, what some of my fellow working artists have to say about this challenge: balancing life with making art. And to remind you that those little bits of time here and there when you are making art, can add up to a very satisfying art-filled life.

"Creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you've got." —Steven Pressfield, author of The War of Art *and* The Legend of Bagger Vance



CALENDAR

Patrice Drago Pygma Micron pen and oil paint markers on bristol 6" × 6" (15cm × 15cm)

Patti Brady

TB: Patti, as the director of the Golden Working Artist Program, you travel extensively and work many hours. How do you manage having a full-time job, traveling and making time for your own creative work? What's your secret?

PB: Sometimes *I* wonder, and often I feel like I never get to the studio. Over the years I have found a few ways to continue to make art. When I am really busy with my job, I just have to tell myself that my art-making is living in my head and eventually it will come out on the canvas.

I actually sometimes have many months in a row that I am not in the studio. I try to keep Fridays as a studio day when I am not traveling, but that works only about half the time! I like knowing I have three free days for only studio. I will book studio days in my calendar.

I also try to go to painting retreats, such as Anderson Ranch and Penland. I find it is absolutely necessary to get out of my own studio, away from the computer and normal life, and go someplace where I am totally free to focus on my work. There I get up at six, go to the studio, eat breakfast, go back to the studio, have lunch, go back to the studio, eat dinner and go back to the studio—for two solid weeks. It is amazing how the ideas get cooking and the work gets made. That solid immersion can carry me for a year or two with new work.

TB: Do you have a dedicated art-making space? If so, what's it like?

PB: Yes, and I always have. Right now I am in a wonderful old funky boarding house converted to seven artists' studios. My upstairs perch is surrounded by old windows on three sides—very challenging for wall space, but I love the light. I like having fellow artists around; it keeps me inspired and anxious to get to the studio. I have lots of flat tables and surfaces to work on.

TB: How do you encourage inspiration? For example, say you have only this coming Friday to paint. Do you have to be inspired?

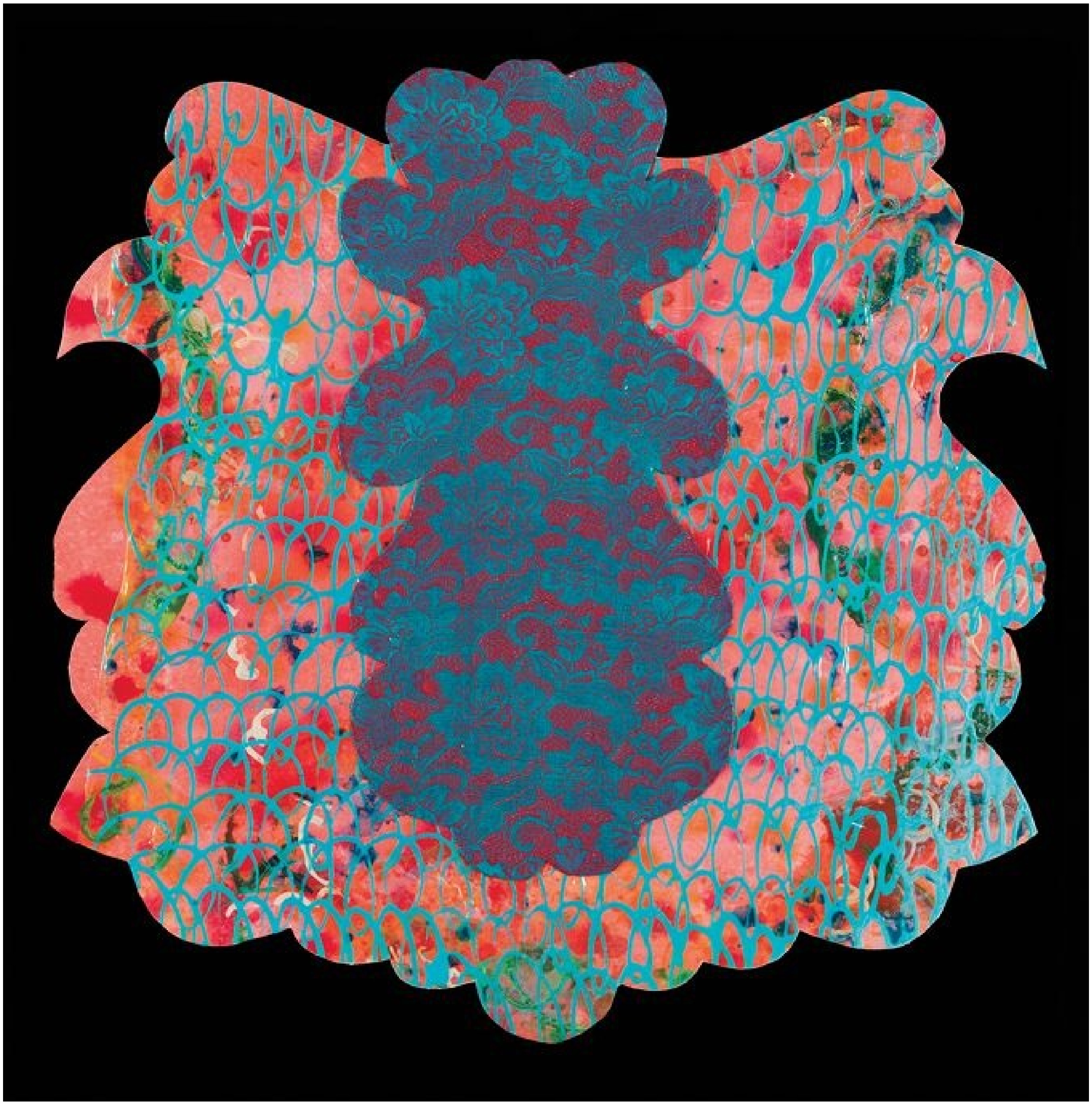
PB: I always have many paintings in process—probably twenty or so. Because I work in layers, the layers need to dry. So if I have only a day, there is always another layer or two that I can do!

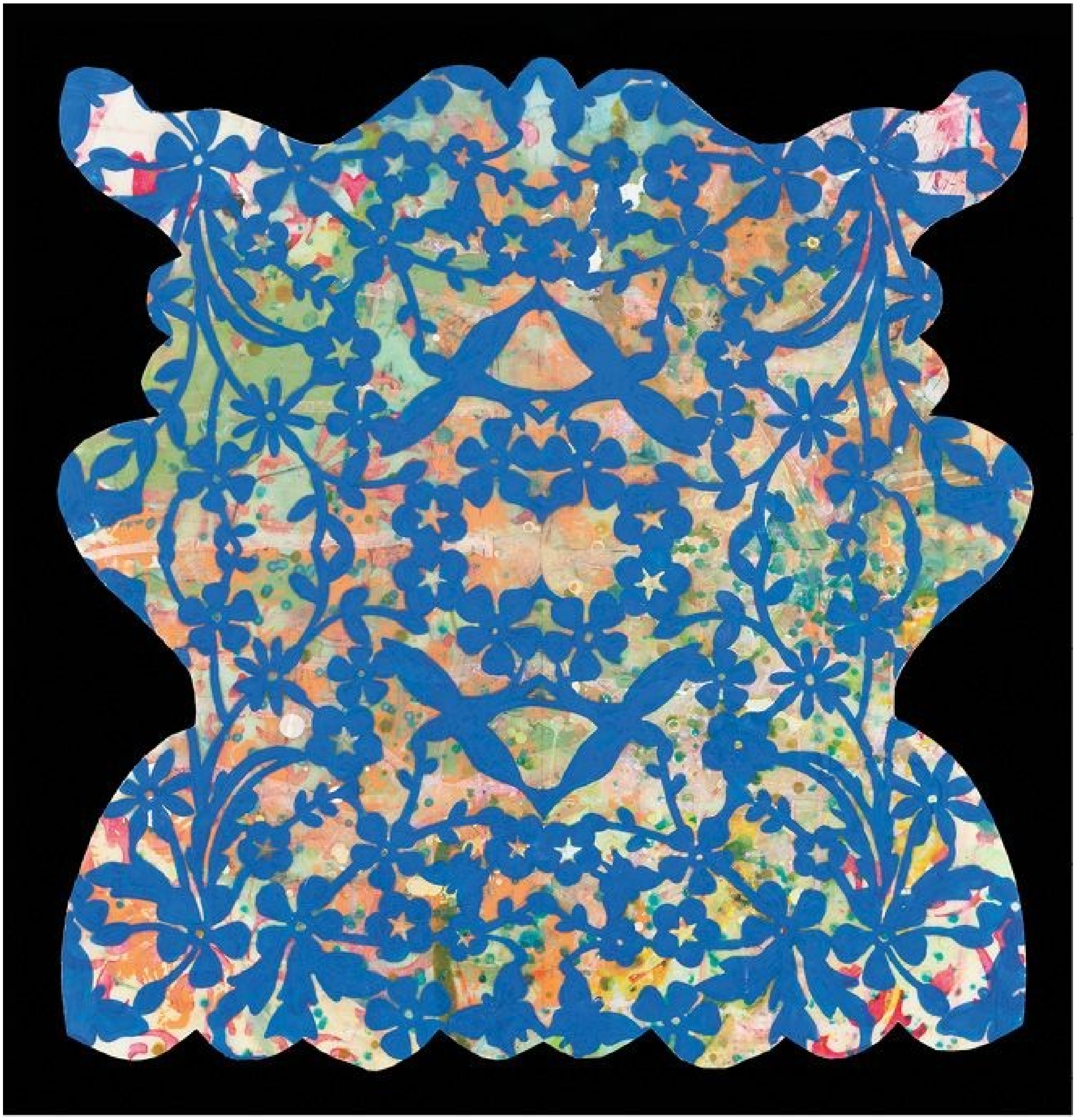
With limited time to work, I don't want to agonize over what to do next, so I guess I have trained myself to be very experimental and not worry too much about screwing up something. If I do, I will just add another layer and keep working it until it is finished.

There is not much time spent contemplating my navel or even my next step—no time for that; I just have to keep painting! I also have so many ideas that I want to explore that it is hard to have a day without inspiration.

TB: If there is such a thing as a typical day, what is one like for you in the studio?

PB: There is nothing like a typical day, but there are those most-wonderful days: arriving at the studio early morning, having the entire day free to work with music blaring and no interruptions, except for taking my dog Aggie out for a walk, and ending the day with a glass of wine with one of my studio mates!





Patti Brady is the Working Artist Program Director for Golden Artist Colors. Her paintings and prints have been exhibited nationally and reviewed by the *New York Times*. Patti's work is in Greenville County Museum's collection, The Contemporary Collection of MUSC in Charleston (the largest collection of contemporary art in South Carolina on permanent display), and in The Mark Coplan Collection at the South Carolina State Museum and County Bank. She was the recipient of the South Carolina Arts Commission Fellowship in 2007. (One visual artist is chosen each year.)

The Artist's Magazine published an extensive article featuring Patti's unique relationship with the acrylic medium, and an in-depth interview on her influences (July/August 2007).

Patti Brady is the author of *Rethinking Acrylic: Radical Solutions For Exploiting The World's Most Versatile Medium* (North Light Books) covering contemporary uses of acrylic.

Melanie Matthews

TB: Melanie, you have a very full teaching schedule, children at home and still find time to paint. How do you do it?

MM: There is no secret, I work really hard and I don't waste much time. I try to stay organized and keep my priorities straight. Anything deemed unnecessary is firmly at the bottom of the list, like personal grooming. I am a very low-maintenance groomer—that helps!

TB: Have you always had a dedicated space for making art?

MM: I have not had a dedicated space until recently. My children are getting old enough, one is eleven and the other is almost sixteen, so I can start to think about being outside of our home more. As of June 1, 2013, I will have a studio downtown where I can work alone undisturbed. I will keep my little summer studio in the backyard so I can be around when my family is around.

TB: What about inspiration? How do you manage a busy teaching schedule and a family? How do you find inspiration with such a busy life?

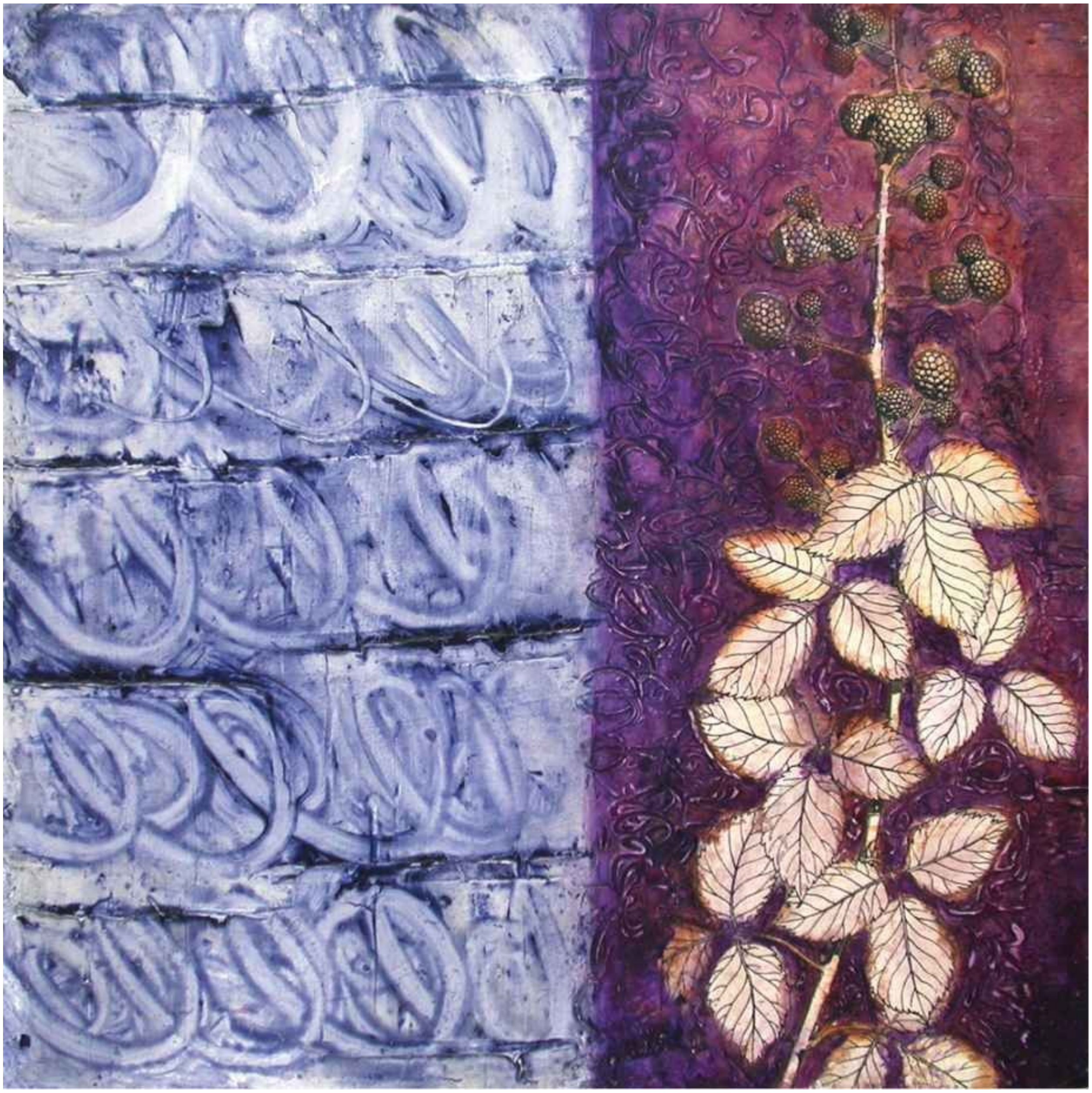
MM: Inspiration is a complete luxury, one that I usually can't afford. It means thoughtful silence, meditation and a clear head. I don't get a lot of that. I see myself more as a worker. I get it through the process, through doing it. I'm a pusher and a puller. I always have something art-related to do, and often applying layers or prepping panels—which are all huge, time-consuming tasks—can be done when I am feeling completely blank.

But there is something about just getting my hands into it that turns it on. I also look at a lot of painting. I am interested in what other painters are doing. I consider myself professional enough to be able to deliver something, not greatness when needed, but some piece of the puzzle. The short answer is I just work hard and work through the rough spots.

TB: Is there a typical day in the studio for you?

MM: A typical day for me is never usually one expanse of free studio time. My days are stacked in three or four sections. I usually never get more than a four-hour block at a time. I teach four classes per week and usually at least one day per weekend, sometimes two. I am always behind on paperwork. And we have tutors and music lessons scheduled for our reluctant boys.

Often studio time is nighttime, after the kids are fed, or morning time, after they go to school, and between classes and workshops. I know when I need to get painting because I start to feel jealous of my students' whimsy and joy in painting.



RHISOME MODEL #4

Melanie Matthews

Acrylic on panel

20" × 20" (51cm × 51cm)

Born in Montreal in June 1962, Melanie Matthews studied painting and drawing at Dawson College from 1979–1981, then Concordia University from 1981–1985, (BFA with distinction) and has been entrenched in the arts ever since.

Splitting time between creating her own work and teaching painting techniques to aspiring artists, Melanie is the official Golden Paints Working Artist for the Province of Quebec.

Dubbed the “Workshop Queen,” given the sheer frequency of workshops and lectures that she gives, Melanie has been invited to lecture, give workshops and teach classes for many venues and organizations, including the Saidye Bronfman Centre, the Visual Arts Centre, Concordia University, UQAM, Canadian Society of Artists and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Melanie maintains an active studio art practice and has had several solo shows of her work, as well as exhibited in many group shows in Quebec, Ontario and abroad.

Melanie is currently represented by The Visual Voice Gallery in Montreal.

Patrice Drago

TB: Patrice, how do you manage having a full-time job, traveling, relationships and still making time for your own artwork? What's your secret?

PD: This is the BIG question, isn't it? Creating a balance between the various aspects of life is a constant challenge. Honoring my own creative flow is the only way I can manage it all. One of the best things I did for myself was to stop listening to all those creative gurus who stated that to perfect your craft you must devote "this many" hours to it every day without fail; start at the same time, all of the habitual stuff. If you are struggling to find an hour here and an hour there, subscribing to that methodology is self-defeating. And everyone's flow is different. That would never work for me even if I never had to work another day in my life.

I believe the key to making time for art is like anything else; it is the belief that painting—or any medium—is as essential to your overall well-being as work and personal relationships.

There are still those times that I look up and realize it has been too long since I have had a paintbrush or pen in my hand, though admittedly the gaps are much shorter now than they used to be. It's a lot like working out at the gym, getting invigorated and committed, and then something gets in the way and you realize you haven't worked out in three weeks. Starting up again is much harder! So I stopped stopping. Instead, when other things in my life steal my studio time, I at least do a tiny little drawing even if it is just for ten minutes. Or I do research for my next art project. If I keep my hand in it, regaining balance becomes easier when I stumble. I also take art classes whenever possible and have no plans to ever stop, for so many reasons. For me it provides goals and establishes commitment.

TB: Do you have a dedicated art-making space? If so, what's it like?

PD: I do! And it is heavenly! But it was a long time coming. Early in my career I moved a lot, and I remember a series of one-bedroom apartments with sketchbooks and paints hanging around various corners.

I remember the first time I actually had the ability to allocate studio space in my home. I went into a thrift shop and literally walked right into a drawing table. *Voila!* My first real piece of studio furniture! That first night I sat down and created a gouache painting from start to finish, and from that moment on, it became easier to work at a moment's notice because the space was there, the supplies were there.

Since then, I've always ensured I dedicate a full room to a studio, even if it meant my guests had to sleep among easels.

TB: What about inspiration? How do you manage to be inspired at a moment's notice or after a long stretch away from art-making?

PD: I'm usually so busy during the week that my mind is like a racehorse. I've learned to make a short note in my Notes app on my iPhone, or take a picture, or anything else I can do to remember that I want to try glass beads as drops on a leaf in a new botanical series, or have a cheetah stand on the back of a zebra, on top of a rhinoceros. (I guarantee I won't remember that one without help by the time Friday rolls around!) My notes are especially helpful when I don't already have a work in progress because I don't have to stare at a blank canvas or paper in order to conjure up an image to create.

One of the things I love about working with acrylics right now is that I find the abundance of mediums and additives to be very sexy. Playing and experimenting with Glass Bead Gel, Clear Tar Gel, Crackle Paste, to name just a few, inspire me and get me thinking, *how can I use these?*

The driest spell for inspiration in my world is after I've completed a series and had an exhibit because I am somewhat depleted. I usually want to start something new and different from the series I just finished, and determining what that looks like isn't always easy. Working with a mentor has helped me enormously by giving me exercises that take me in a direction I wouldn't have gone in by myself and that stretch my creative brain.

When I travel, even for business, I always take a small sketchbook, pencils, pens and watercolor pencils (the best ever for traveling). I may not use them, but they are there if I need them. I take pictures to keep on file as reference for exhibits with a theme, such as an urban theme or American landscapes.

And I absolutely use books like this to jump-start me with ideas!

TB: If there is such a thing as a typical day, what is one like for you in the studio?

PD: Since I am not a creature of habit, there really isn't a typical day, but there are some common elements. When I first enter my studio, I almost always turn on my music, and if I remember to, I light a scented candle. I also make sure there is water available for my dog who will eventually come join me.

Very often I work on several projects at the same time, allowing one piece to dry while working on another. There are those times when I get frustrated because a painting went south or I can't free my mind from distractions of my life no matter how hard I try. I've learned to just stop and walk away and go release steam elsewhere, and I usually come back the next time refreshed.

I rarely spend time at the end of any creative session organizing and cleaning because when I'm done, I want to BE done. I use mostly painting knives so there isn't much brush cleaning to be done. Because of this, I sometimes take an hour somewhere during the week just to clean up, organize my materials and take stock of anything I might need. Most of my studio furniture is on wheels so I can work on big pieces or simply reorganize for a fresh new perspective. These acts in themselves contribute to my creativity and often end up influencing my work.

Currently residing in Annapolis, MD, Patrice Drago has been showing and selling work in Maine, New York and the greater Washington, DC area for over two decades, with recognition through state and national juried competitions. Her commissioned works hang at Marriott International Headquarters in DC and in private collections. Dedicated to continuous evolution of her skills, she maintains an active art education through workshops, retreats and alliance with a mentor to gain fresh perspectives and learn new techniques. She volunteers as a writer/editor and board member of the Maryland Federation of Art (MFA), and has contributed artworks to MFA and other nonprofit organizations such as the Cultural Alliance of DC and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Additionally, she writes the monthly Gallery column in the *Annapolis Capital* newspaper.

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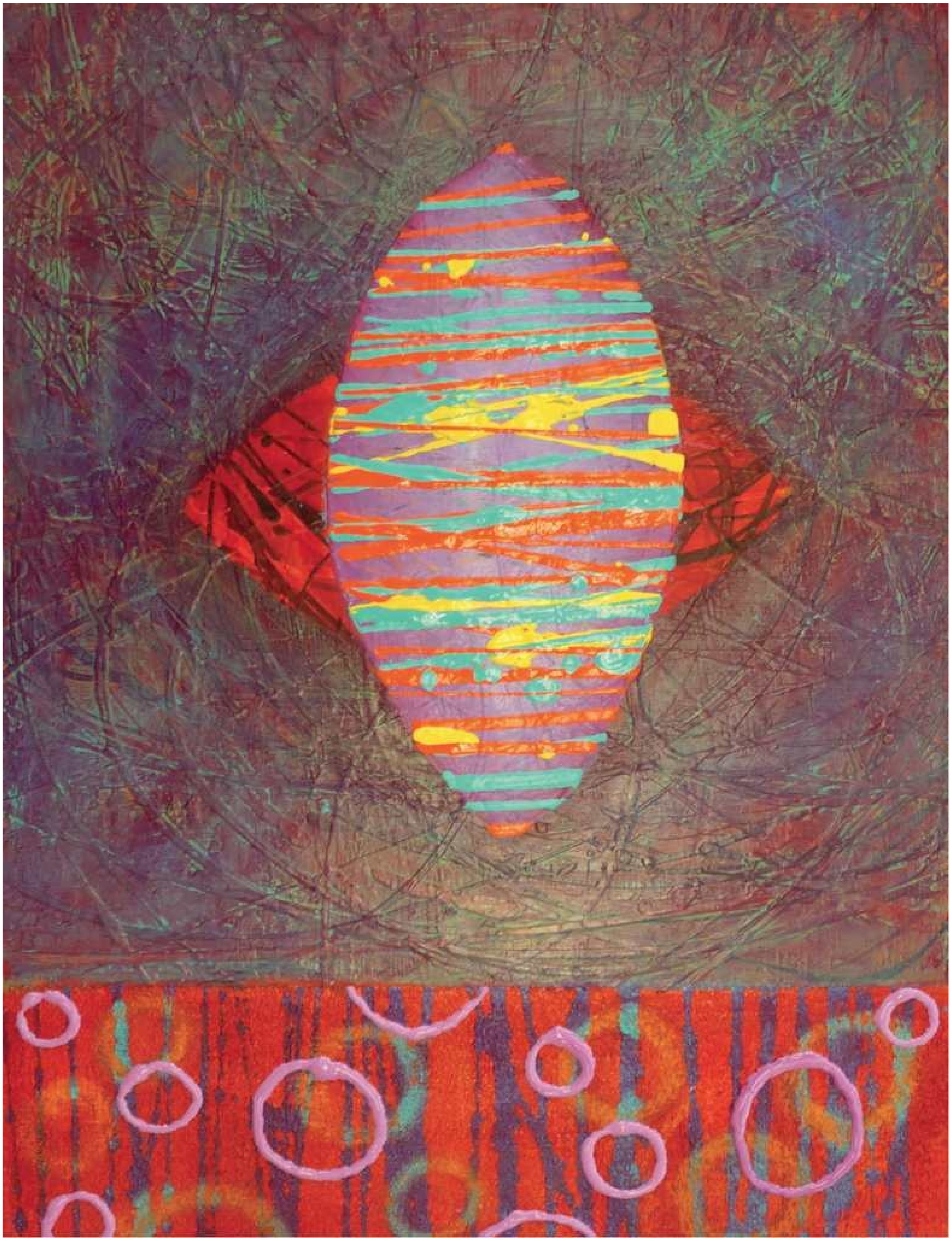

CELEBRATE

Tesia Blackburn
Acrylic on canvas
16" × 20" (41cm × 51cm)

About Tesia Blackburn

PASTES
GELS
Transparent

Tesia is passionate about the formal tools of art: line, shape, color, form, texture and light. She often works in series, taking inspiration from music, architecture and the world around her. As Tesia sees it, the goal of her work is to capture the harmony and beauty in seemingly simple elements and reflect them back to the viewer. Built up of many, many layers of paint with an eye to translucent color and luminosity, her work reflects a thirst for strong design.

Tesia has been a working artist in the San Francisco Bay Area for over twenty-five years. In 2000 she was hired by Golden Artist Colors as the Golden Working Artist in San Francisco. Her work is collected both locally and internationally with patrons as far away as Tokyo.

Tesia Blackburn was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and after many life travels, currently resides in San Francisco.

Visit Tesia online at www.AcrylicDiva.com

Dedication

For B., whose love makes all things possible.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt thanks to my mom, Dorothy and my dad, Cliff, who always told me I could do anything I set my mind to. I miss you, Dad!

Much appreciation and deep thanks to my Golden family: Mark and Barb Golden, Pat Pirrone and the tech staff. Your generosity and creativity knows no bounds and is deeply appreciated. Thanks, too, to all the Golden Working Artists out there who keep it real every day.

A special thanks to Patti Brady, who let me chase her down in a parking lot and gave me the opportunity to work with Golden. May your hair always be full of colors!

A special howdy and hug to Buck Blackburn and all the Kansas City crew for being such great supporters. Thanks to my son, Jacob and my grandkids, Raven and Wolfgang. You're awesome!

Thank you hardly covers it for Tonia Jenny, my amazing editor, hand-holder and saint. I know I gave you a headache or two and you never said, "Ouch!"

More thanks go out to my fabulous students, who are really my teachers. There are way too many of you to number here but you know who you are and how much I love you all. Especially the Orinda gang; Elise, Tina, Lynn, Valerie, Jackie, Ruth, Lisa and Carol. You all inspire me again and again.

Finally, many thanks to my main furry man, Mr. Soxx, my love-dog, who taught me what creativity really is (and also how to take the perfect nap!).

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